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# THE PERFECTLY REDEEMED ACTING PERSON: TOWARD A MARIOLOGY OF PROREDEMPTION

*Richard Bulzacchelli, S.T.L.\**

Mariologists are broadly familiar with Karl Rahner's characterization of Mary, along Scotistic lines, as "the perfectly redeemed person."<sup>1</sup> Yet, for the most part, little attention has been paid to the precise point of intersection this description

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, "The Fundamental Principle of Marian Theology," *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies* 1 (August 2000): 86-122. Rahner articulates the fundamental principle of Marian theology as the affirmation that Mary is "the fulfilled type of humanity redeemed in the most perfect manner possible" (105), and "she who has received the fullness of grace and has been perfectly redeemed" (105). Rahner articulates this principle in a variety of ways throughout this article, but he does not associate this concept with Scotus explicitly, even though Rahner's wording is nearly identical to that employed by the Subtle Doctor in his *Ordinatio* where he writes that "a most perfect mediator has a most perfect act of mediation possible with respect to some person for whom he intercedes—therefore, Christ had the most perfect degree of mediation possible in regard to some person with respect to whom he was mediator; but with respect to no person did he have a more excellent degree than as regards Mary; therefore. . . . But this would only be because he merited to preserve her from original sin" (III, dist. 3, q. 1, *contra primum*, taken from John Duns Scotus, *Four Questions on Mary*, trans. Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M. [Saint Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2000]). In the same place, Scotus says, again, "a more perfect mediator merits the removal of all punishment from the person whom he reconciles; but original sin is a greater punishment than the loss of divine vision, . . . since sin is the greatest punishment an intellectual nature can suffer; therefore if Christ has reconciled us most perfectly to God, he has merited this most grave punishment itself be taken from someone—but only in regard to his mother. . ." (III, dist. 3, q. 1, *contra primum*). Still again, he writes, "It is commonly

evokes. In Catholic philosophical and theological discourse, Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II) has brought to the forefront of our concerns the *problem* of the *person*. What is it, really, to be a *person* as opposed to a *thing*—an *I* or a *thou*, as opposed to an *it*? This question is the subject of much of Wojtyła's pre-papal work, including his lectures on *The Acting Person*,<sup>2</sup> and a number of subsequent essays in which he continues that analysis.<sup>3</sup> In these works, Wojtyła elaborates upon the meaning and implications of *personhood*, bringing into dialogue the *for-its-own-sakeness* of the person, and the person's inherently communal orientation. To do this, he develops the idea of *participation* along lines that move far beyond the classical metaphysical sense of *derivative being or action*. For Wojtyła, "*participation* corresponds to the person's transcendence and integration in the action because . . . it allows man, when he acts together with other men, to realize thereby and at once the *authentically personalistic value*—the performance of the

assumed, however, that he [Christ] was so perfect a mediator for some person—say Mary—that he preserved her from all actual sin. Why then should perfect mediation not be from original sin as well?" (III, dist. 3, q. 1, *contra primum*).

<sup>2</sup> We consult, for our purposes here, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, Analecta Husserliana (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publ. Co., 1969/1979). This text was originally published as Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn* (Kraków: Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1969). A revised Polish edition was published in 1985, but it is unrelated to the "definitive" revision undertaken in association with Tymieniecka. This is not the place to enter the ongoing debates surrounding the degree of authority to be accorded to the English edition over against the Polish or the many foreign translations based upon it. The reader should be reminded, however, that the English translation is made from a "definitive" Polish manuscript which Wojtyła himself had approved, and that this is not the manuscript used in the original Polish edition, nor in the second Polish edition.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Karol Wojtyła, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," in his *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, ed. Andrew N. Woznicki, Catholic Thought from Lublin, vol. 4, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 187-195; idem, "Participation or Alienation?" in *Person and Community*, 197-207; idem, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," in *Person and Community*, 209-217; idem, "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Person and Community*, 219-261. Original-language bibliographical information for these articles is given (in order listed) as: Karol Wojtyła, "Osobowa struktura samostanowienia," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 29/2 (1981): 5-12; Karol Wojtyła, "Uczestnictwo czy alienacja," *Summarius* 7/27 (1978): 7-16; Karol Wojtyła, "Podmiotowości I 'to, co nieredukowalne' w człowieku," *Ethos*, 1/2-3 (1988): 21-28; Karol Wojtyła, "Osoba: Podmiot i wspólnota," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 24/2 (1976): 5-39.

action and the fulfillment of himself in the action."<sup>4</sup> He explains that "[a]cting 'together with others' thus corresponds to the person's transcendence and integration in the action, when man chooses what is chosen by others or even *because* it is chosen by others—he then identifies the object of his choice with a value that he sees as in some way or another homogeneous with his own."<sup>5</sup> For Wojtyla, this understanding of *participation* is not simply some *fact* about the human person, but, "is a distinct *feature* of the person"<sup>6</sup>—"a *property of the ... concrete person* in his dynamic correlation with the action."<sup>7</sup> If this is so, can our understanding of Mary as "the perfectly redeemed person" be enriched by Wojtyla's analysis of the concept of *participation* and of his idea, in general, of the *acting person* who is able to "fulfill himself or herself through his or her actions"?<sup>8</sup> Does Wojtyla's development of these concepts open up new vistas for understanding Mary's role in the process of redemption? We contend that these questions should be answered in the affirmative, and that in this affirmation rests the foundation of John Paul II's thinking about Mary as reflected in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater*.<sup>9</sup> This decidedly personalist paradigm can help theologians articulate the perennial mystery of Mary to the contemporary world in new, unexpected, and truly compelling terms.

### Some Initial Considerations for a Fully Catholic Mariology

As we begin, we must stress again, central to Wojtyla's thinking as a philosopher is the idea of *participation*, understood as a fundamental dimension of personal existence. For Wojtyla, the concept of participation is bound up, not only with *being*, but also with *acting*. It is precisely in *participation* that the value of *acting* as a moral reality fundamentally takes its

<sup>4</sup> Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 7.3 (270).

<sup>5</sup> Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 7.3 (270).

<sup>6</sup> Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 7.3 (271), *my emphasis*.

<sup>7</sup> Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, literal, unrevised 7.3 (327); *my emphasis*. Cf., also, Karol Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," 219-261 (238).

<sup>8</sup> Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 7.6 (282).

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987. We take our quotations from John Paul II, encyclical letter "Mother of the Redeemer" (*Redemptoris Mater*), Vatican translation (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1987).

shape—for the human act necessarily entails a relationship between the Self who performs the action, and the world of persons affected, directly or indirectly, by the act. In the human act, the reality of the person as *existing together with others* comes to light as our actions either affirm or deny participation in the common good. For Wojtyla, in other words, participation is more than the mere fact that human beings are ontologically bound-up with others and dependent upon some reality greater than ourselves. Participation is the *affirmation of this reality in terms of deliberate action*. Thus, *participation* is *acting together with others*, not simply as an accidental characteristic of the act we undertake, but as an essential component of it.<sup>10</sup> When we *participate* we act, quite deliberately, *together with others*, and affirm, in our acting, our mutual interdependence.<sup>11</sup> The implications of this concept of participation are really quite profound. We *choose interdependence* and bring it into full realization. We, therefore, affirm as a good for our own self-actualization, the common value of the community in which we seek our own belonging—the common value of our interdependence with others—and work for its realization, precisely through that which we, for our own part, are able to provide from within ourselves.

This understanding of participation as something fundamental to our notion of the human act—as that which confirms and completes the human act—must, for Wojtyla, carry with it implications in the arena of theology, particularly with respect to the question of human participatory agency and *Mariology*. If what we have said so far is true, we should expect that Mary will emerge within John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, as a case in point that purifies and explicates the thesis on the whole. In other words, for John Paul II, Mary, as the “perfectly redeemed person,” will emerge as the “perfectly redeemed *acting* person” and, thus, as the “perfectly redeemed *participant*.”

But what will this mean? First, we must accept the fact that the Incarnation event represents a fundamental change in the

<sup>10</sup> Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 237.

<sup>11</sup> Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 236–254.

entire arena of human activity. John Paul II says this clearly when he asserts that the *fullness of time*, which concurs, somehow, with the *fiat* of Mary, brings about the sanctification of time itself in the Incarnation of God in the human world.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Mary's *fiat* changes, not only the present in which she herself, as an individual human person, performs a human act, but also moves out from her in all directions across time and space. Her *fiat* somehow comes to touch all human beings—not only her contemporaries, but also her ancestors and “generations yet unborn.”<sup>13</sup> Mary's motherhood, therefore—her motherhood of all those who live in Christ, her Son—extends even into the past, to those who “awaited Christ”<sup>14</sup> and “placed their hopes in Christ before he came.”<sup>15</sup> John Paul II writes:

From the Cross, that is to say from the very heart of the mystery of Redemption, there radiates and spreads out the prospect of that blessing of faith. It goes right back to “the beginning,” and as a sharing in the sacrifice of Christ—the new Adam—it becomes, in a certain sense, *the counterpoise to the disobedience and disbelief* embodied in the sin of our first parents.<sup>16</sup>

How can this be? Within the scope of theology proper, we can say that, as the author of the book of Hebrews makes clear, salvific time is not purely linear in its trajectory. The figure of Melchizedek is a *type* of Christ (Heb. 4:14-8:13) and, thus, appears on the scene as a foreshadowing of Christ. Christ is not an image of Melchizedek, but the other way around. For example, Christ says, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). The transfiguration narratives, also, appeal, quite clearly, to a

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987, no. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Psalm 22:31; Luke 1:48.

<sup>14</sup> *Catechismus Ecclesiae Catholicae* (1999), Pt. 1, Art. 5, sec. 633.

<sup>15</sup> Eph. 1:12. We use, here, *The Jerusalem Bible*, Reader's Edition, Alexander Jones, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1968). While not always the most literal translation available, *The Jerusalem Bible* succeeds in capturing the Hebraic sense of the Scriptures in a way that most translations do not, and, thus, often achieves a more accurate reading in terms of *meaning*, than a purely literal translation is able to achieve, given the hermeneutical presuppositions of contemporary English grammar and phraseology.

<sup>16</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 19.

non-linear conception of time.<sup>17</sup> Here, we see Moses and Elijah, who embody the Law and the Prophets, appearing in the presence of Christ with glorified bodies. We will provide no actual analysis of this passage, other than to point out its presupposition of a non-linear conception of the interrelatedness of temporal causes. Moses and Elijah appear in glorified bodies, along with Christ, who, in that theophany, also appears in his post-resurrectional form, but in a scene universally situated *prior* to the historical resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is, in some way, already present to Moses and Elijah, who now live in Christ-Ascending, even as linear time has not yet entered upon that moment. But if that is so, then Moses and Elijah are, in a very real sense, *born of Mary* in Christ, because the resurrection presupposes the Incarnation, which comes to us through Mary's divine maternity. If, therefore, Mary's divine maternity comes on account of her *fiat*, then the *fiat* of Mary has effects that extend even to the transmutation of the past, and the reshaping of its inner architecture of grace. To the extent that grace is genuinely and efficaciously present in the Old Covenant, and not simply indicated by way of a promise made to a people of future times, it is present there and then on account of the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, which the human race receives through Mary's *fiat*.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> It is well known that traditions about bodily assumptions were wide-spread at the time of Christ and before, with the Old Testament itself clearly depicting Enoch as having been "taken up," even without tasting physical death, and Elijah boarding a fiery chariot for heaven, in which, like the burning bush, the earthly creature enters the pure flame of the divine Life without harm. Other traditions, like *The Assumption of Moses*, based upon the enigmatic statement in the book of Deuteronomy that "No one has ever found his body, because God himself laid him to rest" (Deut. 34:5-6), and the Assumption of Jeremiah, who had been "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Jer. 1:5), all go on to set the stage for the transfiguration scene in the New Testament.

<sup>18</sup> This is the intuition of Gregory of Nyssa, who interprets Moses' desire to draw nearer to the burning bush as a desire to draw nearer in *time*, rather than in *space*, to an event of the future he saw in faith already to be taking place (*On the Birth of Christ*, PG 46, 1133D-1136B; this passage comes to our attention through Luigi Gambero, S.M., *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. Thomas Buffer [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999], 155-156).

### Understanding Mary's *Fiat* as a Human Act

Mary's *fiat* can be analyzed according to the two dimensions of human activity that come together to form the basis of participation in Wojtyla's schema. The first is the *intransitive* dimension of the act, and the second is the *transitive* dimension.<sup>19</sup> For Wojtyla, as he explains, clearly in *The Acting Person*, the *intransitive* dimension of the act is the first moment of the human act. It is the point at which the human person decides, inwardly, to affirm the value of the object chosen, and becomes conformed to it—to say, "I am one who would do this thing, and affirm this value over all competing values." In this moment, whether or not the act is fully realized in the external forum—even if the act fails to yield any measurable external, *material* effect—the agent chooses to be defined by the willing of the moral object in question. This is what Christ means when he speaks of the interiority of personal holiness and cleanliness. It is not that the external has no relevance, but that it does not simply exist or not exist on its own; it proceeds from the heart (Matt. 15:11). Thus, "if a man so much as looks at a woman with lust in his eyes, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). When Mary says "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), she is saying "I am one who says, 'yes' to God." With this in mind, it becomes clear why her *fiat* must be preceded, immediately, by her proclamation, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord!" (Luke 1:38). Our reading, here, finds confirmation in the exultation of Elizabeth, who declares "Blessed is *she who believed* that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Luke 1:45). Mary, *she who believed God*, says "yes" to him, out of that faithfulness, and in realization of it in terms of concrete action. John Paul II writes, along these very lines:

The Father of mercies willed that the consent of the predestined mother should precede the Incarnation.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Wojtyla, *Acting Person*, 4.1 (150).

<sup>20</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, no. 56.



And Mary gives this consent, after she has heard everything the messenger has to say. She says: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38). This *fiat* of Mary—"let it be to me"—was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery. There is a complete harmony with the words of the Son, who, according to the *Letter to the Hebrews*, says to the Father as he comes into the world: "Sacrifices and offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me.... Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:5-7). The mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished when Mary uttered her *fiat*: "Let it be to me according to your word," which made possible, as far as it depended upon her in the divine plan, the granting of her Son's desire.

Mary uttered this *fiat in faith*. In faith she entrusted herself to God without reserve and "devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son."<sup>21</sup> And—as the Fathers of the Church teach—she conceived this Son in her mind before she conceived him in her womb: precisely in faith!<sup>22</sup> Rightly therefore does Elizabeth praise Mary: "And blessed is she who believed that *there would be a fulfillment* of what was spoken to her from the Lord."<sup>23</sup>

In this passage, it becomes clear that John Paul II is concerned, deeply, with the *interior movement of the will*, which Mary's *fiat* represents in verbal form. By virtue of this interior movement, the *intransitive* dimension of the act is realized, and Mary definitively confirms her personal conformity to the moral object of value. In doing so, she opens herself as a *person*, disposing herself to work for the further realization of the *transitive* dimension of the moral act in question. John Paul II writes:

Now, while Mary was with the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem at the dawn of the Church, *her faith, born from the words of the Annunciation, found confirmation*. The angel had said to her then: "You

<sup>21</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 13, citing *Lumen gentium*, no. 56.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, citing *Lumen gentium*, no. 53; Saint Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate*, III, 3: PL 40, 398; *Sermo* 215, 4; PL 38, 1074; *Sermo* 196, I: PL 38, 1019; *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, I, 29, 57: PL 44, 142; *Sermo* 25, 7: PL 46, 937-938; Saint Leo the Great, *Tractatus* 21, *de natale Domini*, I: CCL 138, 86.

<sup>23</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 13.

will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great . . . and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end " [Luke 1:31-33]. The recent events on Calvary had shrouded that promise in darkness, yet not even beneath the Cross did Mary's faith fail. She had still remained the one who, like Abraham, "in hope believed against hope" (Rom. 4:18). But it is only after the Resurrection that hope had shown its true face and *the promise had begun to be transformed into reality*.<sup>24</sup>

The *intransitive-transitive* dynamic comes poignantly into view in this brief passage. Again, the *intransitive* dimension of the act is prior to the *transitive*, having an interior effect upon the person even in the absence of the transitive, exterior effect. John Paul II alludes to this fact when he says, "The recent events on Calvary had shrouded that promise in darkness, yet not even beneath the Cross did Mary's faith fail. *She had still remained the one who*, like Abraham, '*in hope believed against hope*.'"<sup>25</sup> Now, again, the *transitive* dimension is that dimension of the act whereby the act effects a change in the *external state of affairs*; and it comes about in two ways: *physically* or *materially*,<sup>26</sup> and *interpersonally*, *socially*, or *communally*.<sup>27</sup> Again, John Paul II alludes to both these modes in the passage cited here. Mary will give birth to a male child. But that effect is both a *material* and a *communal* effect; for the child is another *person*, who will enter into relationship with her and with others, giving shape, through this *interpenetration of persons*, to the community as a whole. John Paul II makes this point as he references the quote from Luke's Gospel where the angel exclaims, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great . . . and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."<sup>28</sup>

While, in our normal experience, the material effect of an act is usually obvious—the grass becomes shorter by my mowing

<sup>24</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 26 (*emphasis* and *ellipsis* in document).

<sup>25</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 26 (*my emphasis*).

<sup>26</sup> Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," 238.

<sup>27</sup> Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," 246.

<sup>28</sup> *Redemptoris Mater* no. 26, quoting Luke 1:31-33.

it, or the dishes become clean by my washing them—the communal effect of the act is much more subtle.<sup>29</sup> It is also more profound, however. We must note, first, that the communal effect of an act is prior to the merely material effect, because the communal effect will occur, even if the material effect does not. Joseph Ratzinger even goes so far as to suggest that the communal effect of a human act forms the real substance of the mystery of original sin.<sup>30</sup> We cannot explore this thesis in any depth here, of course, except to say that, if, in the *intransitive* moment of the act, the agent confirms or changes the sort of person he or she is, then, *ipso facto*, the agent confirms or changes his or her relationships with other human beings. In the end, this is why certain acts can lead to *estrangement*, while others can create a climate of friendship, even when the precise act is not directly perceived by other people. The development of interior virtue or vice will yield relational effects—effects that extend beyond the interiority of the person, to the sphere of self-transcendence, where the Self and the Other necessarily implicate one another in constructive or destructive ways.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> We speak, here, merely of the immediate *experience* of the material and communal effects of the act. It is clear that there are exceptions to this statement. There are many acts, from which the material effects are the less obvious, at least at first, while the communal effect is much more obvious. The immediate physical effect of sexual intercourse, once physical virginity has been lost, endures only as long as the act itself, while communal consequences may appear more obvious after the fact. These communal consequences, however, also have a physical or physiological component, however, at least in women, who, as a result of the excretion of the hormone oxytocin, experience an enduring affection toward the person proximate to the event in which the hormone has been produced. Further, the physical effects of the act may include the transmission of disease, which, at first, may go entirely unnoticed.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1995), 71-74. This is a pre-papal text—a point that it is only fair to mention. However, the text, which is based upon a series of homilies he gave in 1981, prior to his appointment to the Prefecture of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was revised after his appointment and originally published in 1985.

<sup>31</sup> This approach to the problem of original sin would allow for an alternative to the thesis of monogenesis (that all human beings are descended from a single set of

### Framing the Problem of the Universal Influence of Mary's *Fiat*

Here, we can begin to see how and why Mary's *fiat* has universal influence. On Wojtyła's model, it is unthinkable that any human act be purely *private*—for a human act is, by nature, transcendent of the person's mere individuality. In fact, he says, "transcendence is as if another name for the person."<sup>32</sup> A human act always involves others, even if it does so by excluding or alienating them. Indeed, in this sense, the word *private*, as a descriptor of the quality of a human act, is apropos; for it indicates what makes the act *evil* in its interpersonal dimension, namely, the fact that it lacks some positive quality required for its perfection. An *inwardly-turned* act—a selfish or self-enclosed act—is an act in which one resists participation and, thus, affirms alienation as a master value.

Now, with all of this said, we can ask, what it is, precisely, that makes Mary's *fiat* different from ours. If an *interpersonal reach* is always a dimension of a human act, Mary's *fiat* does not really differ from our own in this respect, as such. On the other hand, the peculiarity of the object of choice—the Incarnation of Christ in the historicity of her own womb—does not appear to be the central issue either, *if* we mean by this the

first parents: a historical Adam and a historical Eve), at least as far as the thesis of original sin itself extends. Pius XII defended monogenesis against polygenesis (a thesis favored by many paleo-anthropologists) on the grounds that the state of the question of the mystery of original sin did not allow for any coherent account of original sin on the polygenetic model (Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, 12 August 1950, no. 37). Ratzinger's approach avoids this difficulty, while also avoiding the overly biologicistic trappings of the common doctrine of the West. Those trappings account for the resistance of Eastern Christians to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, even as the Eastern Fathers appear to supply the foundation for it in the Tradition of the Church. Still, the thesis of polygenesis itself may comport other difficulties with respect to the faith, in particular as concerns the unicity of the Church as the participation in the New Creation, with its rebirth from above through the New Adam and the New Eve. There can only be one way to this New Creation, just as there had only been one way to the first creation. This is Paul's thesis, where he says, "Just as through one man, sin entered in, so through one man righteousness" (Rom. 5:12-21). Monogenesis may not be required to account for original sin, but it may still be required to account, according to the "divine pedagogy," for regeneration through baptism and Eucharistic communion.

<sup>32</sup> Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," 233. Cf., also, 230.

simple historical and physical fact that she became a mother of a boy, who happened to be the Son of God.

The first of these theses seems to place Mary, even in her earthly life, on a different metaphysical plane from that in which other human beings find themselves. Protestants object to what they perceive as extreme mariological sensibilities of apostolic Christianity. It is the reason why the term *co-redemptress* is understood incorrectly as placing Mary at the level of Christ, as if she were a fourth divine person who completes the Incarnation event by assuming humanity in its feminine expression.

The second of these theses—that the universality of Mary's *fiat* is rooted entirely in the *material* effect of her divine maternity, which is universal *only* on account of Christ's universality—also falls short of the mark, as we have said, but this time, in the typically Protestant direction. But what is the problem with this assertion? After all, it would be completely unacceptable to suggest that, somehow, the efficacy of Mary's *fiat* could be separated from the grace of Christ's Incarnation, death, and resurrection, as if it were a completely distinct event, the meaning and force of which emerged exclusively from Mary's agency. That would be a form of *Pelagianism*, taking us back to the Scholastic debates over the Immaculate Conception, once regarded by many Western theologians as an *improbable*, or even *impious*, opinion.<sup>33</sup> The typically

<sup>33</sup> St. Bernard of Clairvaux is, perhaps, most notable here, being more emphatic in his opposition to the thesis of the Immaculate Conception than others who share his general opinion, such as St. Anselm, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Luigi Gambero states, rather bluntly, that "Bernard's attitude toward this Marian dogma appears to be completely negative" (Luigi Gambero, S.M., *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*, trans. Thomas Buffer [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005], 137). Gambero summarizes Bernard's *Epistula 174*, written to the canons of the cathedral at Lyons upon news that they continued to celebrate the Feast of the Conception of Mary after its suppression. For Bernard, he writes, "the celebration is not part of the ancient tradition of the Church; it is unknown to the Church universal of his time; and it is not in conformity with the criteria of reason." Gambero goes on to say that Bernard, "considered this custom to be the result of an excess of zeal on the part of people who claimed to be honoring the Mother of the Lord but went beyond what was legitimate and fitting."

Protestant objection falls short, not because it rightly insists upon the inseparability of Mary's act from Christ's act, but because it relies too heavily upon a purely *naturalist*, rather than *personalist* understanding of *participation*, and ends by reducing Mary to a kind of by-stander, who simply *happens to be* the vessel, or conduit, through which God effected the Incarnation.<sup>34</sup> The idea of Marian *intercession* has no meaningful place in this dynamic, because Mary is not admitted as an *agent* in the process of the Incarnation at all. She is the pure *passus* over against God's *actus*.

### Toward a Solution, through a Point of Departure between Personalism and Scholasticism

Among the issues that come immediately to the fore, in this moment of the discussion, is the fact that, in the Scholastic framework, *active potency* and *passive potency* are the only metaphysical categories available within which to frame this discussion. We need not parse out the many variant schools of Scholasticism as we offer this comment, for it is a nearly universal characteristic among them<sup>35</sup>—although Duns Scotus does begin the long process of opening the door to an expanded set of concepts here.<sup>36</sup> With *personalism*, however,

<sup>34</sup> Even John Macquarrie, in his article "Mary Corredemptrix" (in his *Mary for All Christians* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1990], 98-115), presents a view of Marian mediation that rests entirely upon a past event—namely, the event of her bearing Christ, historically, in her womb. Even as he acknowledges the importance of her active agreement to do this, Macquarrie still does not provide any apparatus for a meaningful account of Marian mediation as a continuing activity across time.

<sup>35</sup> This metaphysical dichotomy is the problem, ultimately, at the root of the debates about predestination and election in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We can speak of so-called *secondary* causes, but if, in the end, the secondary cause only acts within the scope of activity to which the *primary* cause gives rise, each and every detail of history in all its particularity unfolds, inescapably, in accord with a predetermined plan, and the final destiny of each—heaven, hell, or limbo—will infallibly absorb its occupants as God unilaterally decrees from all eternity, assuming no risk at all in his choice to create the human person.

<sup>36</sup> Duns Scotus's third "volitional posture," according to which the human being is conceived of as somehow able to remain unmoved by a perceived good and unpulsed by a perceived evil, called philosophers over subsequent centuries to consider alternative possibilities to the strict dichotomy between active and passive language,

a third category is introduced into the discussion—that of *receptivity*—which constitutes an active opening of the Self to the Other.<sup>37</sup>

What this finally means is difficult to explain in scholastic terms because, within the scholastic frame, we must rely upon only *active* and *passive* language. Receptivity—or, perhaps it is better to say, at this point in the discussion, *reciprocity*—is a sort of *unification theory*, in which the whole metaphysical dynamic, rooted in the inner life of the Triune God, is brought together as a whole. Aquinas's first way opts for the separation of the two poles of reciprocity in terms of the active and the passive, in accord with an Aristotelian metaphysic that originally conceived God as a part of the cosmos,<sup>38</sup> rather than

since the will could no longer be conceived as something *merely* moved, but as a spontaneous, if nonetheless *responsive* agency proper to personal being. Scotus himself already begins to push along this developing horizon in his treatise on act and potency in Book IX of his *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, especially QQ. 14-15, where he seems to argue, not first from a set of preconceived metaphysical postulates, but from his observations of the power of free-will in human agency. Upon this evidence, he finds himself prepared to rethink the whole problematic along lines that fundamentally alter the parameters of dialogue on the question of the philosophy of freedom. Even his treatment of the question of God already begins to move away from a strictly Aristotelian metaphysical model, though it would certainly be wrong to suggest that his thought here was not essentially scholastic. For Scotus's treatise, see, John Duns Scotus, *A Treatise on Potency and Act: Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle, Book IX* [Latin text and English translation], trans. Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M. (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 2000). See also, Richard H. Bulzacchelli, "Duns Scotus's Third 'Volitional Posture,' and a Critique of the Problem of Moral Indifference in Our Time," *Franciscan Studies* 58 (2000): 77-109.

<sup>37</sup> We have elaborated upon this theme in another venue: Richard H. Bulzacchelli, "Opening the Self to the Other: A Personalist Response to Contemporary Challenges to Catholic Sexual Ethics," in *Ethical Issues in Sex and Marriage, Spring 2008 Institute of Bioethics Conference, Franciscan University of Steubenville, Steubenville, OH (March 2008)*.

<sup>38</sup> See Aristotle's reasoning in *Physics* VIII (250<sup>b</sup>10-267<sup>b</sup>26), resulting in his arguments for the eternal first mover in chapter 6 (258<sup>b</sup>10-260<sup>a</sup>19). Aristotle argues that all cosmic motion must reduce to a first and unmoved mover, lest there be an infinite regression of causes. This is essentially the same argument Aquinas offers in his first way (*Summa Theologiae* I.2.iii), but with a few striking differences. For Aristotle, this conclusion leads to the idea of an eternal cosmic motion based in the eternity of the first mover, who moves eternally. For Aquinas, however, it leads only to the eternity of

concluding that the hylomorphic constitution of the created order points to a reality wholly transcendent, from which these two poles emerge as from an *Exemplar*<sup>39</sup>: an eternal dynamism of *giving and receiving*.<sup>40</sup> In his *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger writes at length concerning this issue. In the following passage he discusses the content of the dogma of the Triune God. He writes:

"Father" is purely a concept of relationship. Only in being-for the other is he Father; in his own being-in-himself he is simply God. Person is the pure relation of being related, nothing else. Relationship is not something extra added to the person, as it is with us; it only exists at all as relatedness.

Expressed in the imagery of Christian tradition, this means that the First Person does not beget the Son in the sense of the act of begetting

God's creative intention, or "predestination" (*Summa Theologiae* I.23). Aquinas removes God from the universe according to the requirements of his Christian faith, but he maintains the essential Aristotelian content, and does not avoid its resultant philosophical difficulties. Of relevance, here, also, is Pseudo-Aristotle's *On the Universe*, 6-7 (397<sup>b</sup>10-401<sup>b</sup>29). While a spurious work, its bold resemblance to Aquinas's treatise on Providence in *Summa Theologiae* I.22 is striking, as it seems to weave a conceptual thread through the Aristotelian heritage on the philosophy of God.

<sup>39</sup> Here, Plato's intuition is especially relevant, even if he finds himself still only grasping at the reality we come to see from the biblical perspective. In his *Republic*, he speaks of the Good as wholly transcendent of the created order, even of the act of objective being (ἐπέκεινα της ουσίας). It would be disingenuous to appeal, at this point, to the concept of *Being-as-such*—the abstract ὄντος—suggesting that the Good (ἀγαθός) transcends objective being (οὐσία) precisely as sheer existence (ὄντος), because Plato says very clearly that both οὐσία and ὄντος derive from ἀγαθός. In his thinking about the Good, at least as far as this point goes, Plato is grasping at something *close*, metaphysically speaking, to what we are suggesting concerning the biblical concept of God.

<sup>40</sup> In this sense, the Aristotelian-Thomistic characterization of God as *Pure Act* and *Unmoved Mover*, appears as inadequate, not because the argument leading to this conclusion is *internally* flawed, but because it reaches to the very origin of the reality upon which the argument is based, but fails to draw the dynamic together in its cause. Let the arguments stand as far as they go. But if we do not allow the full dynamic to find itself intact in the First Cause, whole dimensions of the very reality of the created order will be seen to exist *only*—and Aquinas, for example, is quite clear about this—as *negations*, rather than as positive expressions of the divine cause. This failure lies at the root of Aquinas's insistence—again, in conformity with Aristotle—that women are ontologically inferior to men, thus leading to their metaphysically "passive" role in the generation of offspring.



coming on top of the finished Person; it *is* the act of begetting, of giving oneself, of streaming forth. It is identical with the act of giving. Only as this act is it person, and therefore it is not the giver but the act of giving, "wave" not "corpuscle". . . . In this idea of relativity in word and love, independent of the concept of substance and not to be classified among the "accidents," Christian thought discovered the kernel of the concept of person, which describes something other and infinitely more than the mere idea of the "individual". . . . relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality. . . . a new plane of being comes into view.<sup>41</sup>

Here let us suggest that it may be possible to demonstrate, not *Pure Act* and *Unmoved Mover* at the end of the first way, but *Pure Reciprocity* and *the Prime Lover*, as Ratzinger seems confidently and consistently to suggest.<sup>42</sup> On this model, the dynamic of reciprocity is that unified whole in the inner life of God, which, in the act of creation, comes to find expression in the hylomorphic relations of *act* and *potency*. It is only once the creative *exitus* occurs, in other words, that the dual principles of *active* and *passive* potency emerge. Thus, at the heart of these relations is something fundamentally one; and the more noble the being, the more its own inner dynamism comes to reflect this fundamental unity, and to inform the metaphysical constitution of the being in terms of relationality and reciprocity, or what Wojtyla, at one point calls, *reflexivity*.<sup>43</sup> In any event, when all is said and done, there has emerged within the created order, as well, a third term which is neither *merely* active, nor *merely* passive, but as we have said, *receptive*. With this so-called *active receptivity*, which must be regarded as a *positive*, rather than a *negative*, ontic moment, the full content

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Communio Books/Ignatius Press, 1990), 131-132.

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, in which he describes God's love for the human person in terms of *Eros* (nos. 3-15), and uses phrases like, "God's passionate love for his people—for humanity" (no. 10; see also, no. 9) and makes statements like, "In the foregoing reflections, we have been able to focus our attention on the Pierced one (cf. *Jn* 19:37, *Zech* 12:10), recognizing the plan of the Father who, moved by love (cf. *Jn* 3:16), sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem man" (no. 19). We use, here, the Vatican Translation. There seems no honest way to reconcile these turns of phrase with the metaphysical category of *Actus Purus*.

<sup>43</sup> Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," 242.

of the eternal reciprocity of God can finally be represented in our metaphysical analysis of the created order. With this new category at our disposal, we can see how the gradation of being must, in the end, lead to the emergence of an increasingly profound reciprocity, until we arrive, finally, at the human person, and discover that "it is [simply] not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18).

What, then, is the answer to the Marian question, in light of everything we have just said? We cannot hold that Mary is pure passivity—nothing more than a vessel; nor can we hold that she is, somehow, independent of any relational term external to herself, as if she were a divine person whose *alter-terminus* is contained within the reciprocity of her own essence. Rather, if we remember that it is only in the creative *exitus* that the categories of *active* and *passive* potency emerge, then the gradation of being becomes an indication of the *reditus* to God; and it is in this context that the Marian question can be answered, through the third category of *receptivity*. Here, Mary appears, not as something wholly *other* than human beings, nor as something no different at all from the rest of us, but, instead, as someone who lives the life toward which creation tends. This is what it means to say that Mary is *vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra salve* ("our life, our sweetness, and hope of our salvation") (*Salve Regina*).

But again, one might object, have we not simply replaced Christ himself with Mary, thus rendering the Incarnation event wholly superfluous? Why do we need Christ—what does he do for us—if Mary has already reached this summit of human existence? There can be no question that scholastic objections to the concept of the Immaculate Conception, still represented in Protestant theology, are bound up with these questions.<sup>44</sup> But

<sup>44</sup> The dominant line of thought among those theologians of the Mediaeval West who objected to the Immaculate Conception involved the claim that the Immaculate Conception would, somehow, exempt Mary from the necessity of Christ's salvific intervention. This would make Mary herself the culmination of humanity, or the ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ (*eschatos Adam*), lending a theologically perverse meaning to the common devotional declarations about Mary in praise, prayer, and hymnody. Read in this light, the *Salve Regina* becomes idolatry, and we have forged a direct link with the contemporary Evangelical perspective.

here, it is crucial that we remember that the entire meaning of Mary's *fiat* lies in its *reciprocal* dimension. It represents the response of humanity to God's creative act of self-gift. The stakes, here, are quite high, indeed; and to understand them, we must again return to the idea of our third metaphysical category of *receptivity*, by which, as John Paul II writes, "*in Mary's faith*, first at the Annunciation and then fully at the foot of the Cross, an *interior space* was reopened within humanity which the eternal Father can fill 'with every spiritual blessing.'" John Paul II is indeed quite clear about this point as he goes on, in this passage,<sup>45</sup> to say:

It is the space "of a new and eternal Covenant,"<sup>46</sup> and it continues to exist in the Church, which in Christ is "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind."<sup>47</sup>

In the faith which Mary professed at the Annunciation as the "handmaid of the Lord" and in which she constantly "precedes" the pilgrim People of God throughout the earth, the *Church* "strives energetically and constantly to bring all *humanity* . . . back to Christ its Head in the unity of his Spirit."<sup>48</sup>

In this passage, John Paul II's language is emphatically personalistic, drawing attention to the receptive dimension of personal subjectivity, that gives rise to the dimension of *inter-subjectivity*, or the fact that persons, as subjects of action, can *interpenetrate* one another's "*interior space*," accepting the implications of the other's personal value. This requires an understanding of the relationship between the *intransitive* and the *transitive* dimensions of the personal act, as they come to bear upon the *communio personarum*. When John Paul II says that Mary, "as the 'handmaid of the Lord' . . . constantly 'precedes' the pilgrim People of God throughout the earth," as

<sup>45</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 28.

<sup>46</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 28; here citing the *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayers.

<sup>47</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 28; here citing the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 28; here citing *Lumen gentium*, no. 13. *Emphasis* is original to *Redemptoris Mater*.

we go on to work, as a body, "to bring all humanity . . . back to Christ . . . in the unity of the Spirit," we are reminded of the *priority* of Mary's *interior* act—the *intransitive* dimension of the act—to the act's external, *transitive* dimension, in response to which we are able to elicit our own act. John Paul II draws attention to this fact earlier in *Redemptoris Mater*, where he writes:

The Council expresses this when it states in another passage that Mary "has gone before," becoming "a model of the Church in the matter of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ."<sup>49</sup> This "*going before*" as a *figure or model* is in reference to the intimate mystery of the Church, as she actuates and accomplishes her own saving mission by uniting in herself—as Mary did—the qualities of *mother and virgin*. She is a virgin who "keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse" and "becomes herself a mother," for "she brings forth to new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God."<sup>50</sup>

All this is accomplished in a great historical process, comparable "to a journey." *The pilgrimage of faith indicates the interior history*, that is, the story of souls. But it is also the story of all human beings, subject here on earth to transitoriness, and part of the historical dimension. . . . Here there opens up a broad prospect, within which the *Blessed Virgin Mary continues to "go before" the People of God*. Her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church, for individuals and for communities, for peoples and nations and, in a sense, for all humanity.<sup>51</sup>

Once the Incarnation occurs, we cannot continue to look upon God in terms that leave him wholly unaffected. As Ratzinger says, "He is not the unfeeling geometry of the universe, neutral justice standing above things undisturbed by a heart and its emotions."<sup>52</sup>—for to do this would be to deny that

<sup>49</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 5; here citing *Lumen gentium*, no. 63, along with Saint Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. Sec. Lucam*, II, 7: CSEL 32/4, 45, and *De Institutione Virginis*, XIV, 88–89; PL 16, 341.

<sup>50</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 5; here citing *Lumen gentium*, no. 64.

<sup>51</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 6. *Emphasis* is original to the document.

<sup>52</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 100.

the Person-Logos "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), entering into the historicity of the human community. It is one thing to argue that he does this in and through the human nature he assumes from the body of the Virgin Mary, but we cannot say this in some tacitly Nestorian sense, as if to suggest that this human nature somehow stands on its own, apart from the divine Person who becomes Incarnate thereby. If we forget that the whole point of the Chalcedonian confession is to say that the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth is none other than that belonging to the divine Person-Logos, such that it is the Person-Logos who suffers, we unwittingly retreat to the very problem we had sought to avoid.

That said, once again, it would seem that *active* and *passive* potency are really elements of the *created* order, while the divine wholly transcends this dichotomy. Now, we are reminded of the fact that, from within an Aristotelian frame of reference, the fact of creation presents an unanswerable conundrum. St. Thomas cannot explain how, or why, a God who knows all things only through his own self-contemplation would ever think to create a being other than himself. He thinks, in the end, only *in and through himself*, never with any external referent,<sup>53</sup> since that would mean, on the Aristotelian model, limited as it is to only the active and passive dimensions, that God was dependent for his knowledge, and thus for his perfection, on the creature.<sup>54</sup> An assertion such as this would take us back, directly, to the old *kata physis* heresy.<sup>55</sup> The

<sup>53</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.5 (430<sup>a</sup>14-26), *Metaphysics* 12.9 (1074<sup>b</sup>15-1075<sup>a</sup>10); Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.14.ii-vii, xi.

<sup>54</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.14.iv.

<sup>55</sup> The *κατά φύσιν* (*kata physis*) heresy consists in the assertion, as the term implies, that God is dependent upon the creature for some perfection of his own. This assertion is heretical in that it requires an alteration of the Judeo-Christian conception of God; the meaning of the name Yahweh involves the proposition that he cannot be controlled in any way, by anyone other than himself. The *κατά φύσιν* heresy only makes sense metaphysically, either on a *pantheistic* model, according to which God becomes increasingly perfected as the universe becomes increasingly perfected (e.g., process theology), or else on the *demiurgic* model, according to which God is conceptualized, not as the *foundation* of all being, but as himself a *derivative* of Being, subject to conditions that also proscribe his "creatures," which he brings about, not *ex nihilo*, but by manipulating the prime matter already given along with his own existence.

contrary would mean, however, that God would think, from eternity, only *of* eternity, that is, only of *himself*, as Aristotle clearly states in his famous passage in *De Anima* 3.5,<sup>56</sup> with which Aquinas appears to agree.<sup>57</sup> This is why the problem is unanswerable from within a Thomistic frame of reference. For if the appeal to the *ratio of love* is finally to mean anything at all, it must represent an appeal, precisely, to God's *other-centeredness*—to the eternal dynamism whereby he is, in himself, *one who goes out to the other*, and is, thus, able and willing to think of the *other*, and to intend the *other*. In this context alone does the fact of creation make any sort of metaphysical sense. Thus, when God finally gives rise to a being who is able to *respond in kind* to God's outward movement, the movement of creation reaches its final term<sup>58</sup>—no longer only to be *other-than* God, but finally to become *one-with* him,<sup>59</sup> entering into the very reciprocity of the First Cause of the creature's own becoming.

### Approaching Mariology through an Integration of the Concepts of Receptivity and Participation

For Ratzinger, who follows Teilhard de Chardin on this point, reciprocity between humanity and divinity is precisely the meaning of the *eschatos Adam* ("the final man who takes man into his future") in Pauline and Johannine theology.<sup>60</sup> But again, how do we distinguish, in all of this, between what Christ is doing, and what *Mary* is doing—or what *we* are doing? This is where an appeal to the metaphysical priority of God becomes essential. *Christ* is that precise moment in which

<sup>56</sup> 430<sup>a</sup>14–26.

<sup>57</sup> While Aquinas reads Aristotle differently on this point in his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima* (X.728–745), he holds, as we have already seen, the same view of the divine intellect (*Summa Theologiae* I.14.ii–vii, xi).

<sup>58</sup> This theme runs through the whole of Ratzinger's work, but it may be seen in representative form in *Introduction to Christianity*, 198–199.

<sup>59</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 175–182.

<sup>60</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 175–182. Our reference to Pauline theology includes the theological perspective at the foundation of the letter to the Hebrews. Here, the authors of Hebrews and Paul present a similar theological perspective.

God's *yes* to creation, and most of all to *humanity* as the personal embodiment of creation, reaches its fullness in a final *re-reception* by the Prime Lover. Here, Christ emerges as the man who is so fully *man-for-God* as to be *Man* for God, and to *be* God.<sup>61</sup> The significance of Mary, in all of this, is her decisive and irreplaceable role as the one who says *yes* to God in his choice to bring creation to precisely *this* fullness. Here the divine *reciprocity* calls forth in the created order the category of *receptivity*, which is and must be contained pre-eminently within the divine reciprocity itself. Receptivity thus emerges, as we have already said, as a third category within the created order—a category according to which the mode of being of the creature is neither *merely* active nor *merely* passive, but *actively-opened-out to the other*, as God is in his eternal reciprocity. This fundamentally relational reality, most fully exhibited in the realm of the interpersonal, is, perhaps, indeed, the most perfect manifestation of the image of God within the created order.<sup>62</sup> Mary is the one who, in and through her own act of *receptivity* to God's initiative, opens creation to its eschatological fulfillment in Jesus Christ and, thereby, enters into the divine reciprocity.<sup>63</sup>

The distinct significance of this moment becomes apparent as we return, once more, to Wojtyła's concept of *participation*. For Wojtyła, "the concept of participation basically serves to express the property by virtue of which we as persons exist

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 272.

<sup>62</sup> This reciprocity is most evident and foundational in the relation "man-woman," which must be understood to carry a fullness of meaning that exceeds the merely biological content of the relation "male-female," represented in beasts and even in vegetation. Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 163-164. In this passage, delivered November 14, 1979, John Paul II not only suggests that the creation of the human being as "male and female" *does* present us with an image of God in and through sexual differentiation, but also that, in fact, this *relational* dimension of the divine image "constitutes perhaps the deepest theological aspect of everything we can say about man" (164). The view here expressed by John Paul II borrows very closely from the Trinitarian model discussed by St. Augustine in his *De Trinitate* XII.5—a view Aquinas had come to dismiss as "manifestly absurd" (*Summa Theologiae*, I.93.vi.ad 2).

<sup>63</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 6 and 28.

and act together with others, while not ceasing to be ourselves or to fulfill ourselves in action, in our own acts."<sup>64</sup> Wojtyla's next comment is important if we wish to avoid the tendency to equate Wojtyla's thought with that of St. Thomas, that is, to overlook or even refuse to accept what is truly new and challenging in it. He insists that

This notion of participation does not have much in common with the Platonic or Scholastic notion. It serves instead to specify and express what it is that safeguards us as persons along with the personalistic nature and value of our activity as we exist and act together with others in different systems of social life. That is precisely what I meant by participation in *Osoba i czyn*, namely, the ability to exist and act together with others in such a way that in this existing and acting we remain ourselves and actualize ourselves, which means our own *I*s.<sup>65</sup>

We can hear an echo of this very passage in *Redemptoris Mater* (no. 12), as John Paul II goes on to say that Mary "responded, therefore, *with all her human and feminine 'I'*, and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with 'the grace of God that precedes and assists' and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who 'constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts.'"<sup>66</sup>

Here, again, the idea of participation *must* take us beyond the sheer fact of our creatureliness—beyond the sheer fact that we do not exist of ourselves, but come to exist, and are held in existence as the beings that we are, through the agency of the one who exists of himself. For Wojtyla, participation really means the ontic power of agency, which he sees as proper to the person *as person*, such that true self-determination is possible in a quite radical way. At the same time, however, it also means, in Wojtyla's usage, that fundamentally *public* and *communal* dimension of human existence and action, which requires the power of receptivity. For Wojtyla, *participation* means that the person *ought to be* one with others in action,

<sup>64</sup> Wojtyla, "Participation or Alienation?" 200.

<sup>65</sup> Wojtyla, "Participation or Alienation?" 200.

<sup>66</sup> *Emphasis* is original to *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 13, here citing *Lumen gentium*, no. 56.



while remaining personally distinct in that action, and becoming, in that *action-taken-together-with-others*, most fully personal and subjective. It means that *as this person*, this person makes his or her agency over to the public and common good—a good which the person affirms as bound-up with his or her own self-actualization—thereby receiving, as a dimension of his or her own personal fulfillment, the implications of the other's personal value. John Paul II writes:

*Through this faith Mary is perfectly united with Christ in his self-emptying.* For "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men": precisely on Golgotha "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (cf. Phil. 2:5-8). At the foot of the Cross Mary shares through faith in the shocking mystery of this self-emptying. This is perhaps the deepest "*kenosis*" of faith in human history. Through faith the Mother shares in the death of her Son, in his redeeming death; but in contrast with the faith of the disciples who fled, hers was far more enlightened. On Golgotha, Jesus through the Cross definitively confirmed that he was the "sign of contradiction" foretold by Simeon. At the same time, there were also fulfilled on Golgotha the words which Simeon had addressed to Mary: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also."<sup>67</sup>

If as "full of grace" she has been eternally present in the mystery of Christ, through faith she became a sharer in that mystery in every extension of her earthly journey. She "advanced in her pilgrimage of faith" and at the same time, in a discreet yet direct and effective way, she made present to humanity *the mystery of Christ*. And she still continues to do so. Through the mystery of Christ, she too is present within mankind. Thus through the mystery of the Son the mystery of the Mother is also made clear.<sup>68</sup>

Here, John Paul II sees Mary as *efficaciously active* in the making-present of the mystery of Christ. This is a profound and far-reaching truth; for it tells us that, as a created person, she nonetheless cooperates, through an *active receptivity*, in God's own kenotic self-outpouring, through which, in becoming

<sup>67</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 18. *Emphasis* is original to the document.

<sup>68</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 19. *Emphasis* is original to the document.

Incarnate, he "reveals man to himself," such that "the mystery of man takes on light."<sup>69</sup> Indeed, later in the encyclical, John Paul II goes on to say that Mary draws attention to this very fact concerning the dignity of humanity—a dignity which he sees as distinctly feminine, even as it is universally accessible to all. He writes:

[T]he figure of Mary of Nazareth sheds light on *womanhood as such* by the very fact that God, in the sublime event of the Incarnation of his Son, entrusted himself to the ministry, the free and active ministry, of a woman. It can thus be said that women, by looking to Mary, find in her the secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement. In 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.<sup>70</sup>

John Paul II makes clear that this "self-offering totality of love," which reflects a dignity that places femininity at the very center of the question of human dignity, allows women to find in Mary "the secret of living their own femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement." It is to be found, in other words, on the Marian paradigm, just as on the paradigm of the acting person, that precisely insofar as we, in affirming the personal value of others and the value of personal interdependence, "exist and act together with others," we not only *remain* ourselves, but also even "*fulfill* ourselves in action, in our own acts."<sup>71</sup>

Relevant here are the passages from *Gaudium et spes* that speak of the dignity of the human person as a for-its-own-sake being, and, at the same time, as one who can only fully find

<sup>69</sup> Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965), no. 22.

<sup>70</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 46.

<sup>71</sup> Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation?" 200.

himself or herself through a "disinterested" act of self-donation.<sup>72</sup> Wojtyla sees these two statements as fundamentally tied together.

[In] the experience of self-determination the human person stands revealed before us as a distinctive structure of self-possession and self-governance. Neither the one nor the other, however, implies being closed in on oneself. On the contrary, both self-possession and self-governance imply a special disposition to make a "gift of oneself," and this a "disinterested" gift. Only if one possesses oneself can one give oneself and do this in a disinterested way. And only if one governs oneself can one make a gift of oneself, and this again a disinterested gift. . . .

Only if one can determine oneself . . . can one also become a gift for others. The Council's statement that "the human being . . . cannot fully find himself or herself except through a disinterested gift of himself or herself" allows us to conclude that it is precisely when one becomes a gift for others that one most fully becomes oneself. This "law of the gift," if it may be so designated, is inscribed deep within the dynamic structure of the person. . . . One could say that this is a portrait in which the person is depicted as being willed by God "for itself" and, at the same time, as a being turned "toward" others.<sup>73</sup>

Now, it is precisely in this *orientation toward the other*—in this "law of the gift"—that the relationship between participation and the common good begins to take shape. A key concept, at this point, however, which neither the conciliar text nor Wojtyla's commentary develops, is that of *disinterestedness*. What does this mean? Clearly, Wojtyla does not imagine anything like a Kantian duty-ethic at this point, even if he does

<sup>72</sup> See *Gaudium et spes*, no. 24. The Vatican translation reads, "a sincere gift of himself," while the Latin reads, "*sincerum sui ipsius donum*." The English and the Latin appear to agree, but Wojtyla focuses upon the meaning "disinterested," which, though not strictly accurate as a translation, appears to reflect the theological meaning of "sincerity" in this context, and may reflect an earlier choice of wording in the original discussions of *Schema XIII* at the Council itself. It can hardly be contested that Wojtyla's interpretation should be taken as authoritative, given his role in the drafting of this document at the Council, according to which he would certainly have understood the original intention.

<sup>73</sup> Wojtyla, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," 194.

take from Kant the idea of duty as a critical element in the moral dynamic.<sup>74</sup> He does not imagine that "just showing up" because I *ought* can be sufficient, but insists upon *personal presence in the context of the duty performed*.<sup>75</sup> In other words, one does little good for an ailing parent merely to visit him/her in the hospital for the sake of duty, followed in some sort of unfeeling way. Rather, the genuinely dutiful child must be *present in the gift as person*—thus manifesting a *desire to be given over*: a desire to be there, to be *with*, and to be *for* the parent. In what sense, then, is this *disinterestedness*? The dutiful child gains the loving company of the ailing parent—finds him-/herself in this act of self-donation, and gains his/her soul and own moral goodness.

Here stands, indeed, a great paradox which Ratzinger develops at length in the whole of his work, articulating it concisely in his treatment of what he calls the principle of "For." In his treatment of this paradox, he goes on to explain:

[The] basic Christian decision signifies the assent to being a Christian, the abandonment of self-centeredness and accession to Jesus Christ's existence with its concentration on the whole. . . .

<sup>74</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "The Problem of the Theory of Morality," in *Person and Community*, 129-161 (esp. 150-151). This article originally appeared as "Problem teorii moralności," in *W nurcie zgadnień posoborowych*, vol. 3 (Warsaw: Wydaw. Sióstr Loretanek-Benedyktynek, 1969), 217-249.

<sup>75</sup> John Paul II, in his pastoral book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 202-203, speaks about the moral import of personal self-donation in the moral act, which, thereby, must always be construed as an interpersonal encounter (even if the other person in the encounter is God). He mentions there the efforts of Kant, Scheler, and other unnamed thinkers, to articulate the moral necessity of making a gift of oneself, while declaring that "a complete expression of all this is already found in the Gospel" (203). Neither Kant nor Scheler succeed, according to Wojtyła, in articulating a "complete expression" of this "truth that Christ taught us by his life, and that the tradition of Christian morality, no less than the tradition of the saints and of the many heroes of love of neighbor, took up and lived out in the course of history" (202). Kant, for his part, so focuses exclusively upon the role of duty that he fails to capture the *personal* and *inter-subjective* dimension of love, while Scheler, as Wojtyła reads him, focuses so intently upon the role of subjectivity and emotion that he fails to capture the *active* dimension of love—that is to say, love as the fullness of the *human act*.

... all man's own efforts to step outside himself can never suffice. He who only wants to give and is not ready to receive, he who only wants to exist for others and is unwilling to recognize that he for his part too lives on the unexpected, unprovokable gift of others' "For," fails to recognize the basic mode of human existence and is thus bound to destroy the true meaning of living "for one another." To be fruitful, all self-sacrifices demand acceptance by others and in the last analysis by *the* other who is the truly "other" of all mankind and at the same time completely one with it: the God-man Jesus Christ.<sup>76</sup>

As Ratzinger makes clear in his characteristically paradoxical way, true *other-centeredness* means that we are prepared to make a gift of ourselves to the other, *aware of the other's personal autonomy*, which can only mean that our self-gift may occasion our falling to the ground in death (dying-to-self, John 12:24) if the other refuses to assume a posture of receptivity before our kenotic self-outpouring. Only when the other becomes receptive can the circular movement of reciprocity or reflexivity finally emerge to fulfill the person in his or her essential communal dimension and bring into full relief the image of God in the created person. It is in this context that the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Cross take on new light, and, with them, the mystery of the Annunciation with its connection to the Immaculate Conception.<sup>77</sup>

Ultimately, this is the meaning of Wojtyla's notion of participation, as it bridges the gap between the *I* and the *thou*—the *thou* who, in being perceived as such, is perceived as another *I* over against my own. It allows human beings, as individuals, to act in unison and to pursue a good truly common to all—that is, the good of our being-in-common as persons, each in the fullness of personal dignity (within the community).<sup>78</sup> He writes, "Participation thus understood conditions the whole authenticity of the human *we*, a *we* that develops objectively on the basis of a relation to the common good but that also—on the basis of this same relation—tends toward the development of the true subjectivity of all who enter into the

<sup>76</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 190, 191.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 9-10.

<sup>78</sup> Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," 246.

social community."<sup>79</sup> Only when this moment is finally reached is the *common good* fully realized and not simply, as it will always be this side of the *parousia*, merely approximated.<sup>80</sup> Thus, though Wojtyla develops his concept of participation as a philosophical category, with fundamentally philosophical concerns before him, there can be no question that, in the end, it carries profound implications for the theological horizon, especially in the dimensions of *soteriology* and *eschatology*. Indeed, as if anticipating this very trajectory, he says:

The fully authentic human being, the human being as a person, the one whose personal identity is disclosed through *I-thou* relationships to the extent that those relationships have the profile of a genuine *communio personarum*, is the one who is and must be permanently inscribed in the true meaning of the common good if that good is to conform to its definition and essence.<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, as we read in *Gaudium et spes*, and a condensed quotation in John Paul II's first encyclical letter, *Redemptor hominis*:

"[O]nly in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. . . . For . . . Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and brings to light his most high calling." . . . "He who is the 'image of the invisible God' (*Col 1:15*), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, *in a certain way united himself with each man*. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin."<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," 254.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 243-278.

<sup>81</sup> Wojtyla, "The Person: Subject and Community," 254.

<sup>82</sup> *Redemptor hominis*, no. 8, here twice citing *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22.

Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, is that "fully authentic human being, whose personal identity is disclosed through *I-thou* relationships to the extent that those relationships have the profile of a genuine *communio personarum*, and who, thus, is and must be permanently inscribed in the true meaning of the common good." For, as John Paul II insists:

Of the essence of motherhood is the fact that it concerns the person. Motherhood always establishes a *unique and unrepeatable relationship* between two people: *between mother and child* and *between child and mother*. . . . For each child is generated in a unique and unrepeatable way, and this is true both for the mother and for the child. Each child is surrounded in the same way by that maternal love on which are based the child's development and coming to maturity as a human being.<sup>83</sup>

### Proredemption

It is at this precise moment—in the contemplation of *this* mystery, that the full significance of Mary finally emerges, and can be expressed in what we might call *proredemption*. We have coined this term to express the moment of *active receptivity* in which Mary, as the pre-eminent person of faith who responds "*with all her human and feminine 'I'*,"<sup>84</sup> as the Fathers had said, "conceives Christ in her heart,"<sup>85</sup> making room for that return—that *reflexivity*—in which the image of the inter-personal God in the human person reaches the point of total *reditus* to him, and finds, in that return, her own fulfillment. John Paul II writes:

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not *participate intimately in it*. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself." If we may use the

<sup>83</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 45.

<sup>84</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 13.

<sup>85</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 25.7: PL 38, 937.

expression, this is the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption. In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity.<sup>86</sup>

This personal and cosmic *reditus*—this union of humanity with Jesus Christ, who “unites himself with every human being,”<sup>87</sup> affirming our personal value, and the value of being-in-common with us—is the *common good*, which is constantly breaking in upon us until, “all things come together under him.”<sup>88</sup> But Mary plays the definitive role in this process of the created person’s *reception* of the *eschaton*. For she gives her assent to the creative and redemptive plan of God in a way that definitively unites the two dimensions: the dimensions of *nature* and *grace*. John Paul II tells us that Mary’s maternal mediation for the Church and the world, which must always be understood as a subordinate, but no less real, participation in the universal mediation of Christ

... flows from her divine motherhood, and can be understood and lived in faith only on the basis of the full truth of this motherhood. Since by virtue of divine election Mary is the earthly Mother of the Father’s consubstantial Son and his “generous companion” in the work of redemption “she is a mother to us in the order of grace.” This role constitutes a real dimension of her presence in the saving mystery of Christ and the Church.<sup>89</sup>

Again, John Paul II crystallizes the various threads of what we have here called *proredemption*, as a participatory mode of intercession, when he writes:

Her election to the supreme office and dignity of Mother of the Son of God refers, on the ontological level, to the very reality of the union of the two natures in the person of the Word (*hypostatic union*). This basic fact of being the Mother of the Son of God is from the very beginning a complete openness to the person of Christ, to his whole work, to his whole

<sup>86</sup> *Redemptor hominis*, no. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Psalm 8:6, 1 Cor. 15:20-28, Eph. 1:18-23, Heb. 2:8.

<sup>89</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 38.



mission. The words "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" testify to Mary's openness of spirit: she perfectly unites in herself the love proper to virginity and the love characteristic of motherhood, which are joined and, as it were, fused together.

...As I have already said, she advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and in this *pilgrimage* to the foot of the Cross there was simultaneously accomplished her maternal *cooperation* with the Savior's whole mission through her actions and sufferings. Along the path of this collaboration with the work of her Son, the Redeemer, Mary's motherhood itself underwent a singular transformation, becoming ever more imbued with "burning charity" towards all those to whom Christ's mission was directed.<sup>90</sup>

The term "procreation" is already familiar to us, but it would be helpful to understand the term in light of Wojtyla's notion of participation. For, if Mary's *cooperation in the work of redemption* flows from "the full truth of her divine maternity,"<sup>91</sup> what we have here termed *proredemption* must be understood in the same context, but specifically insofar as it comes to intersect with the order of grace. Indeed, John Paul II states that "motherhood 'in the order of grace' preserves the analogy with what 'in the order of nature' characterizes the union between mother and child."<sup>92</sup> For Wojtyla, *procreation* means the conscious and active *participation* of human persons in transcending the *I* and the *thou* to form a communally-acting *we*, in which mutual *kenosis* and *reception* come to image and to imitate the divine reciprocity, which now enters into this community, through the somatic reciprocity of the *man-woman* relation, so as to give rise to *personal life*, in the context of this decidedly *interpersonal* encounter—the *total interpenetration of persons*. While God can, and apparently does at times, give rise to personal life on the basis solely of the biological act, without the full *personal-making-presence* of husband and wife in the total self-offering of spousal love, this

<sup>90</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 39.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 38.

<sup>92</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 45.

represents something *unworthy of the human person*, precisely insofar as it is a failure to *participate*. For Wojtyła, "every man [i.e., every human person] must learn to integrate himself into the activity of God and respond to his love."<sup>93</sup> Human beings are called to be *active participants*—persons taken up into the dynamic of reciprocity, obedient to "the law of the gift."<sup>94</sup>

By nature, therefore, human beings are able to enter into this sort of participatory action, in which God and community cooperate in the common project of bringing forth new life at the natural level.<sup>95</sup> In doing so, we become bound to one another and to the new person, as well as to the whole of the human community which is now called upon to make room for the new person, to affirm his or her personal value and, thus, to allow ourselves to be affected by his or her contribution as a person and as a subject of action. In the moment of *proredemption*, however, Mary participates, not simply in an interpersonal encounter that gives rise to a new human being, but in an encounter with God directly, rather than with a human co-participant—which gives rise to the *Eschatological fulfillment of humanity in the order of grace*. Mary's radical personal openness before God comes to mean that Life itself—God's Life—enters into the human sphere through her and invites the whole of humanity to welcome him into our midst and to accept the implications of his personal value.<sup>96</sup> When this occurs, Mary's relationship with God is definitively *assumed* into his eternal election to become one with his creation in the Incarnation.<sup>97</sup> Mary enters into the whole history

<sup>93</sup> Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 258. My [insertion]. This text originally appeared as *Miłość i Odpowiedzialność* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo, Znak, 1960).

<sup>94</sup> Wojtyła, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," 194.

<sup>95</sup> Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 54–57. Cf. also, Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 25 July 1968, nos. 7–13.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 37. Here, there can be no question that the biblical theme of the *anawim*—the poor, the afflicted, the downtrodden, the lost, and the abandoned—is a central hermeneutic for the theological significance of the Incarnation. Indeed, this becomes the very sign by which the shepherds of Christmas morning will recognize the Savior of the world (Luke 2:1–20).

<sup>97</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 8–9.

of creation and redemption, becoming, not merely the *new* Eve, but the *true* Eve<sup>98</sup>—the Eve in relation to Christ as the *eschatos Adam*, to whom she offers the whole of her humanity on behalf of the human race.<sup>99</sup> Mary participates directly in, and becomes essentially linked with, the realization of the only truly *common good*. Her intercession comes to encompass the whole of the temporal trajectory of creation and redemption, not simply as a static fact, but also as a *participatory action* of *receptivity*, in which the *reditus* of humanity to God can now come, continuously, to ever fuller realization.<sup>100</sup> Mary, having been *assumed* into this mode of participation, in the whole of her psychosomatic unity—"the whole of her personal and feminine 'I'"<sup>101</sup>—remains ever engaged in it: always saying *yes* to God for humanity, always receiving Christ into creation, always offering him back to God on our behalf, always being assumed by him. In this way, she always experiences the fullness of glory to which God calls the human person, to the intimate and personal participation in the inner life of God himself. In this thoroughly *personalist* articulation of the mystery of Marian intercession, the Mother of the Redeemer thus emerges before us as the *Proredemptress*—"the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe"<sup>102</sup>; she is the perfectly-redeemed *acting person*.

<sup>98</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, nos. 23-24, 37.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 39.

<sup>100</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 28.

<sup>101</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 22 March 1986, no. 97. This passage is quoted in *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 37.