Charism Made Spirituality

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FROM MONOGRAM TO MISSION

THE RELIGIOUS HABIT

Various Communities Receive Their Habit From Our Lady

Saint Dominic Receives the Habit From the Hands of Our Lady (Detail)
Fra Angelico Oil on Panel c.1436
From Charism to Spirituality

Elusive and multi-facted as may be, the meaning of charism creates associations including grace, gratuity, gift, and generosity. It seems widely established that a charism is the result of divine largesse, an expression of God's favor, and a gratuitous gift of his love. Mentioned seventeen times in the New Testament, the term charism is indebted primarily to Paul's theology of grace, and its twofold instrumentalization as gift extraordinaire or grace of state. The division thus marked highlights the complementary between the special graces of healing, speaking in tongues, and miracles, but also the more utilitarian form of charism destined to the service of the community. If the former kind of charism will always be an exquisite sign of God's gratia gratis data to spirituals and mystics, the latter and community-oriented gift will be important in inspiring fervor and dynamic development to the young church. According to Paul this “grace of state” will prompt both decision and acceptance into the Church. It will be especially useful for the edification of the Church, and helpful to attain a higher degree in the spiritual life. In short, charism is not without a sanctifying influence on the individual since it is always accompanied by an effusion of the Holy Spirit.

The theology of charisms brings to mind the early and medieval understanding of the spiritual life. Early on, and influenced by Eastern theology, spiritual life was synonymous with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and its goal and achievement with the divinization of the person. Later, with Thomas, the quest for virtue, especially the virtue of charity, will dominate the programs of the ascetic and mystical life. With the rise of modernity the ideal of personal perfection becomes prominent, and will influence spiritual introspection and psychological concerns. With the retrieval of the image-and-likeness

1 See: Rm. 12.6-8; 1 Cor. 12, 8-10; 28-30; Eph. 4:11.
2 See: 1 Cor., chapters 12-14.
3 1 Cor. 14, 4 and 28.
4 See: DSp 2/1, 503-507.
theology (Imago Dei) at the Second Vatican Council a new shift can be perceived, both in interest and perspective, regarding divinization as the ultimate human fulfillment. As a consequence, among others, the place and impact of the spiritual senses on the spiritual life are revisited. Examining the different names and traditions related to the concept and reality of the spiritual senses, we concur with Gavrilyuk and Coakley that at the heart of these names and traditions "is the attempt to do full epistemological justice to the radical implications of the incarnation." It is at this point that not only the impact of the Holy Spirit on the spiritual life can be observed, but also the connection with the deeper meaning of charism. In the Incarnation the third person of the Trinity permeates the whole of human reality: the divine Spirit is made flesh, which is also the Spirit of Jesus Christ, forever the Spirit of the Church, and the gratia gratis data of the individual believer. The Church's ongoing incarnational status and destiny confers to all and any charism a double role and objective which comprises a spiritual efficacy. This spiritual efficacy is both gratia gratis data and a challenge to spiritual commitment and life. The law of the Spirit tells us that any gift received will return to God as gift given. The special charism of consecrated life is such a gift received. And so is Mary, in a most special and archetypical way. Both gifts and charisms of the Spirit, Mary and consecrated life, they will have a determining influence on how we see and live the spiritual life.

Marian devotion and spirituality will be with us as long as there exists faith in Christ and his Gospel. Recognizing Christ as the central figure of the Gospel, we will be able to discover in Mary the first Christian, first in time and first as to the quality of her faith. "We need not imagine where Mary is...

6 See: GS 12, 22-41.
7 See the recent collection of historical essays on The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (eds.) published by Cambridge University Press, 2012.
8 The Spiritual Senses... 18.
... she is at the heart of the Gospel,” says J. P. Prévost. Mary is an integral part of Christianity’s genetic code, and so intimately related to the various expressions of its life in past, present, and future. The question here is: How does Mary relate to mainstream Christianity? Can one be Christian without being Marian? Is it legitimate to speak about Christian spirituality without making reference to Mary? Or, in different perspective: How can spirituality be Marian?

I. Spirituality — a Postmodern Phenomenon?

The range of contemporary spirituality, its related movements and contents, is enormous. It reaches from constituted or labeled movements, such as those covered in the recent past by the term “New Age,” to specific techniques like “I Ching” and various life-styles and focused behavioral patterns (e.g., ecology-oriented ways of conducting one’s existence).

A proliferation term, contemporary Spirituality in many ways reflects the two catch words of Postmodern mentality, meaning Wholeness and Experience.

1. Wholeness

Postmodern spirituality advocates unity and wholeness on all levels of human life, and tends to reject whatever separates body and soul, people and their fellow human beings, humans and their physical and “spiritual” environment. Particularization and isolation generate dualisms, something authentic spirituality has to avoid or overcome by all means: “A living spirituality, one built on experience, power, and cosmology, would never acquiesce to even the naming of such a dualism.”

 Sexual liberation and its seemingly fashionable attempt to overcome the opposition between genders is only one example in the Postmodern holy war against dualism. There are other stages in the evolution toward a holographic world view or spirituality, such as the majority-centered morality orchestrated by the social sciences, the conquest of cyberspace and


the construction of a super-highway of information, and, not least, the discovery and promotion of globalization of the social and cultural world based on shaky global economics. In similar fashion, the dualism between the natural and the supernatural is overcome by pantheism or panentheism, a proclaiming that all things are in God and God in all things — garnering a multitude of expressions, from Mechtild of Magdeburg's mysticism to the hugging of trees supposedly endowed with spiritual and transcendent qualities.

2. Experience

A second major characteristic of this age of spirituality can be summarized in the word “experience.” Spiritual activities are designed to quell the deep cravings for emotional density and to lead the individual through personal involvement to radical inner experience of self and all else. The road of experience is patterned with a series of well-known imperatives. Its goal being wisdom rather than reason, spirituality stresses the importance of right brain over left brain, mystical over rational activity, and feminist over patriarchal sensitivity. Spiritual experience is mainly directed toward self, bodiliness and nature, and it attempts to capture the innermost reality of being human, which frequently happens to be also the principle of the universe. Whenever God is an object of spiritual activity, he/she/it is relocated in the sphere of the experiential, becoming the object of the human quest for meaning, which involves all our senses, and our striving for a permanent experience of the presence of God in a so-called mystical continuum. It is in the nature of experience to have recourse to experimenting with the various sources and possibilities of spiritual experience. While sampling and testing these, persons engaged in such experimentation never lose sight of its ultimate objective, which is to reach a new and more permanent peak of spiritual experience.13

This leads to the observation that experiential spirituality frequently bears traits with hedonistic tendencies. The pursuit of experience coincides with the pursuit of spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment, and it frequently reflects the hedonism of consumerism with its quest for immediate and total satisfaction.14


14 A. Glucklich, Dying for Heaven: Holy Pleasure and Suicide Bombers... (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
II. A Challenge to Christian Spirituality

Whether called postmodern or not, wholeness and experience are deeply engrained in contemporary Christian and Catholic expressions of the spiritual life. Prior to Vatican II, spirituality could easily be divided into spirituality for the laity and spirituality for religious. Lay spirituality was in fact mostly devotional, consisting in a variety of prayers to the saints based on instrumental (prayer of petition) and mechanistic (repetitive and quantitative prayer) principles. In comparison, the spiritualities of religious life tended to be highly specialized (for example, atonement spirituality), structured (spiritual accounting, timetables and formalized prayer), and somewhat esoteric (making it difficult to communicate to the uninitiated). Influenced by the three most important factors of ecclesial transformation stemming from Vatican II—the Bible, the liturgy and the world—the two currents blended into one broad general Christian spirituality, considered as a "common property" spirituality. Here are some of its distinctive features: It was a non-differentiated spirituality, in accord with the origins of Christianity, focused on essentials such as love of neighbor and love of God. Rejecting dogmatism, especially clerical and theological, it fostered rediscovery of the spiritual self and put forward the quest of self-actualization for people of all walks of life.

What emerged progressively from this amorphous movement was the spiritual self as evolving reality. Carried on and shaped by various trends in psychology (among them personality psychologies such as ego-psychology, personality typologies, developmental typologies and transpersonal psychology), the spiritually concerned person developed a positive and optimistic outlook on the self, mobilized creative power toward self-transformation, and saw in the quest for God a call to growth within oneself and through interaction with others. Self-discovery and individualization of the spiritual life prompted the understanding of spirituality as process, and of perfection as dynamic growth. Transpersonal psychology emphasized the experience of the self's depth, the experience of unity and harmony between the microcosm of the psyche and the macrocosm of nature.

However, self-centered spirituality is not limited to intimate dealings with inner experience and the exploration of the outer space of consciousness. Personalized spirituality does not shy away from doing battle on the social front. Inspired by the social gospel tradition and various social justice movements, contemporary social spirituality branches out into a number of specific orientations, such as liberation spirituality, ecological spirituality, the spirituality
of empowerment, and mysticism in action. All are opposed to escapist religion, and are sustained by heightened political, moral and religious consciousness.15

III. Four Cornerstones of Christian Spirituality

Authentic Christian Spirituality, which embraces our daily effort to abide in God’s love, needs to be patterned by specific criteria. I would like to mention four of them: its theological foundation; experience as fundamental condition; the challenge of Wholesomeness, and the dialectics of ideal and identification.

1. The Theological Foundation

Christian spirituality is the consequence of theology, meaning God’s revelation about himself and his relationship with us. The testament of his revelation is the Gospel and its interpretation in Tradition. Thus, the Gospel must be regarded as norm and critic of all spirituality in the Church.16 Revelation presents God as an altruistic God who is the source of existence but gives rise to beings outside of himself and unites these beings with himself (Rom 8:15-16). The Creator-God reveals and communicates himself as a trinitarian God, indicating thus fulfilled or satisfied love and, at the same time, willingness and desire to share this love with his creation. And, indeed, God’s love is creative: he sets in our nature an affinity to him (image of God); makes of us “partakers of divine nature”; and bestows on us the grace of the New Creation, which is his own Son and incarnate love, Jesus Christ.

Here is the reason why grace is to be understood as the vital principle of all spirituality. We need grace in order to share in God’s nature of love, but we also need grace to obtain healing of sin, which is the discrepancy between our fundamental option for God and the (less than) full expression of this option in everyday decisions and choices (Rom 7:19). The grace of Christ is the highest form of God’s self-giving, for in this most vital grace for all spirituality, we are in Christ and Christ is in us. In sum, theology tells us that spirituality begins


with God and ends in him. Spirituality's noblest task, therefore, is to regulate our being in Christ.

2. Experience as Fundamental Condition

At the beginning of this relation, we stressed the importance of experience in contemporary spirituality. We made, however, the reservation that not the actual presence of a personal God, but radical experience of self was paramount in various expressions of the so-called “new religiosity.” Experience is one of the highest and most unifying of all human activities, because it stresses the person's awareness of self in relationship with others, the world, or God. Experience is an essentially relational phenomenon involving active and passive elements; in particular, experience as “active passivity” brings our deepest powers into play, and can be found in the highest human experiences such as love, artistic creation and religious ecstasy. We find in experience an experimental proof that the human person is open ontologically to the world, to others, and God.

In religious experience the human person becomes aware of him-/herself in relation to God. We would like to highlight three of the most characteristic aspects of religious experience:

(1) It has integrating character, involving hierarchically all the main faculties of the person: intellect, will, affection, activity, and the social or relational dimension. Authentic religious experience unifies all of these aspects and transcends them in one simple and integrating act. The attempt to reduce religious experience to a single element, for example, affection, leads to loss of the very object of experience.

(2) The experience of the sacred, frequently described as fullness or nothingness, is a mediated experience. In the relationship between God and a human person, there is no face-to-face experience, no direct contact from person-to-person, that is, no presence of God without mediation. Religious experience is and remains a human act by which one receives God as both objective and subjective reality which addresses the whole person, and is accepted by the whole person. And so, God's presence to the person is mediated through God's promise to be present in certain acts and facts (for example, in his word and sacraments), as well as in his free initiative to be present in any sign, in prophecy, miracle or mystical experience.

(3) Religious experience is dynamic in character, because it is based on the simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity existing between God and the human person. The tension between these two poles makes the act of religious experience to be

one of unfolding, self-giving and longing. It propels the person towards the infinite being. The riches found in God's self-giving are bottomless, never exhausted, but never possessed. The presence of God is not a reality given to us in full; it is, and remains, a reality of faith, hope and charity: Deus semper major. Religious experience is a continual search of God's presence at the heart of communion.

The specifically Christian experience means grasping oneself in relation to God. It is self-knowledge both in and for God, "for knowing you, I shall know myself." This grasping of oneself shows both the greatness and the misery of the human person, and leads to union with the unknown god. Christian life adheres to God in faith, is united to him in charity, but, because it is partially obscure and subject to change, it must be supported by hope. However, and this is a decisive difference with religious experience in general, Christian experience is not its own norm. It is experience in Christ, and derives its value and fruitfulness from Christ. Radically open to the life in God through Christ, it must be an experience in faith and in the Church. Lived in the community of faith, and as expression of the communion of saints, it remains nonetheless a personal experience, a secret between God and the soul.

3. The Challenge of Wholesomeness

Having discovered that experience is a fundamental condition of spirituality, the attentive observer is able to see in spirituality a comprehensive activity which challenges the whole person. And, there is more. The spiritual life is an organic whole, and in many ways obeys the laws of organic life or of a living organism. As any organism, spirituality needs to have a life-giving form or configuration through which it expresses or manifests itself, manifesting, by the same token, the existence of the spiritual self. Every living organism is a historical being which follows a life trajectory or personal evolution. Finally, the spiritual life evolves within a specific environment or context. These four aspects contribute to the development of a wholesome spiritual life or organic whole. The history of spirituality is rich in personal examples and schools which document not only the great variety of its concrete realizations, but also the need for structure and organization.

(1) Spirituality needs form or configuration
The history of spirituality knows of two principal forms of the spiritual life. It can be understood as (1) path to union with God or (2) as sequela Christi, the imitation or following of Christ.

(2) There is need for a concrete manifestation of the spiritual life. How does the spiritual life manifest itself; what is spiritual life per se? The classical expression of life in the Spirit is found in the reality of grace and articulated in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Each one of the three, regarded

18 See St. Paul: 1 Thes. 1:2, 5:8-10; 1 Cor. 13:3.
as "holy triad" is inclusive of the other two, and together they constitute the essence of religion.

(3) Spiritual life is a continuum
Its dynamism suggests beginning, progress and maturity, and so we find in the history of spirituality many different expressions of our growth in faith, hope and charity. To mention only some of these models: there is Clement of Alexandria's ideal of the "true Gnostic," Dionysius's *triplex via*, Bernard's "stages of love" (*amor carnalis, armor servilis, amor filialis*), Bonaventure's "Pilgrimage of the Soul to God," John of the Cross's "Ascent to Mount Carmel," and Thérèse Lisieux's "Little Way" or "escalator" of spiritual childhood.

(4) The spiritual life needs context and environment
The individual vocation originates within the context of a call to the People of God as such (Acts 2:41-42), meaning that the spiritual life evolves in and through community, or, as we saw before, that Christian spirituality is church-related. This ecclesial dimension of spirituality is based on the very notion of life in Christ. Life in Christ becomes life in the Body of Christ and in commitment to and for the Church.

4. The dialectics between Ideal and Identification

There is a fundamental psychological reality in spirituality which has roots in incarnation and eschatology. As Christians we live in now and here (Incarnation) for our ultimate fulfillment (eschatology). We also know that the spiritual life is essentially a relational affair, an affair between persons, us and God, we and Christ, Mary and myself, a spiritual I and Thou. And here is where the psychological reality of *Identification* and *Ideal* kicks in. To put it in concrete terms: we need a Jesus Christ who is our brother (identification), we also need a Jesus Christ who is Lord and ultimate model of human fulfillment (ideal). Likewise, we need Mary our sister, the girl from Galilee (identification), and the *Mater Omnium* and Queen of Heaven (ideal).

Identification means existential bonding. It gratifies the person with positive and rewarding relationships. Its immediate gain for the individual are security, acceptance, protection and existential well-being. Spiritual identification prepares authentic and personal identity in the spiritual life. In turn, the ideal and its many forms represent the psychic dynamism which commands progress, self-improvement, and goal-oriented behavior, the famous *ad altiora semper*. Psychologically speaking, it is in the dialectics between identification and ideal, in our relationship with Mary-Sister and Mary-Queen, that the spiritual life thrives and grows — provided — and this is an essential condition — this personal relationship is grounded in love.

20 St. Augustine, *Enchiridion* ad Laurentium seu de fide, spe et caritate, I, 2f (CCL 46, 49).
21 Mt 3:5; Rom. 6:4; Eph. 4:14.
IV. Is There a Marian Spirituality?

There does not seem to exist overwhelming conviction that there is such a thing as Marian spirituality. But there is in ecclesial consciousness a permanent mirroring, reciprocal in kind, between Mary and the Church.

Mary is the sacrament of the Church, just as the Church herself is the sacrament of Jesus Christ. And so the Church sees in Mary her archetype and eschatological icon. Blueprint and RealSymbol of the Church's final accomplishment, Mary is simultaneously the model or exemplar of being a Christian and living a Christian experience. For Christians, the fundamental charism is that of the Church, "the bride without spot or wrinkle" whom Christ brought into being for himself, and who is archetypically realized in Mary, immaculate mother and bride.

1. Marian spirituality — Magisterial Hesitations

Thus, how does the Church perceive "Marian spirituality"? What is its meaning and scope? The expression "Marian Spirituality" is rarely used in Church documents about Mary, and where this happens it is of rather recent date. The habitual language used is that of practices and exercises of devotion, of "cult" or forms of piety towards the Mother of God. The dominant elements are those of honor and supplication, existing in the Church from earliest times, but differing as "cult" from the cult of adoration offered to the persons of the Trinity. We are looking here at a "tribute of faith and love which Catholics in every part of the world . . . [pay] to the Queen of Heaven." The first official Vatican II statement on Mary, though dealing with liturgy and not devotional practices, highlights the same overall attitude of love and honor: "In celebrating this annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, Holy Church honors the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, with a special love." However, in the same article we discover a different aspect of the Church's relation with Mary: In Mary "the Church admires and exalts the most excellent fruit of redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be." Honor and praise, as expressions of loving admiration and joy, are not an end in themselves. Admiration leads to imitation, and so, in turn, the Church desires and hopes to be or become a wholly "faultless image" of Mary. Mary is the "virtuous model" of the Church, but not only the Church

22 Eph. 5:27.
24 SC 103; CCC 1172.
25 CCC 1172.
but faithful individuals also are inspired by her “in the exercise of faith, hope and charity.”26

If admiration is closely related to intercession,27 so are imitation and evangelization (or Marian apostolate). Living admiration breeds trust in Our Lady’s help; imitation achieves greater synergy with who she is and what she does. The Church “looks to her who gave birth to Christ... in order that through the Church he could be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful.”28 However, the Church is concerned not only with the faithful, but she also “strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity... back to Christ its head, in the unity of his spirit.”29

2. John Paul II’s Contribution

None of these various aspects of Marian devotion is explicitly advertised as “Marian spirituality.” It is only with Redemptoris Mater that this term is carefully, even hesitantly, introduced in the theological discourse. Speaking of the life of Christ’s disciple, John Paul II mentions that there is a Marian dimension to this life, which is expressed in the “filial entrustment to the Mother of Christ” and has its origin and foundation in the testament of the Redeemer on Golgotha. Following the example of the beloved disciple, the Christian “welcomes” the Mother of Christ “into his own home,” and makes her an integral part of his inner life, meaning he/she brings Mary “into his human and Christian 'I.’”30 The Marian dimension31 is here closely related to life and self, comprising both Christian and human life and self. In article 48, the insistence on life is once again palatable:32 “Here,” writes John Paul II, “we speak not only of the doctrine of faith but also of the life of faith, and” — he immediately adds — “thus of authentic Marian spirituality.” Repeating the expression “Marian spirituality” a second time, he locates its source: “a very rich source in the historical experience of individuals and... communities.” John Paul II does not offer an explicit description or definition of what he means by “Marian spirituality,” but it would be safe to say that Marian spirituality refers to the experience of a life of faith marked by a special Marian dimension. The latter, the Marian dimension, specifies, as seen above, that the faith-life of Christ’s disciple is patterned on Mary’s presence, her company—and here we

26 Cf. LG nos 53, 63, 65.
27 Paul VI, Recurrens Mensis October, 7 October 1969, 16.
28 LG, 65.
29 LG, 13; RM 28.
30 RM, 45.
31 Again mentioned in RM, 46.
32 RM, 48.
go a step further—formative qualities on behalf of the disciple. Mary “cares for the brethren of her Son,”33 “in whose birth and development she cooperates.”34 The lack of abstract definition is compensated by the remark regarding the importance of spiritual experience. Rather than offering a definition, John Paul II points to the example of Marian spiritual masters and devotees of past and present, such as Grignion de Montfort, and refers the reader to the Marian spiritual traditions of religious movements and communities. By the same token, the pope seems to suggest a difference between Marian spirituality and devotion, without going into details regarding their mutual rapport.

3. Marian Spirituality — The “spirituality of spiritualities?”

Is there a way of justifying—in spite of magisterial hesitations—that Marian spirituality is the “spirituality of spiritualities”?

Hans Urs von Balthasar, who used this expression, situated “Marian spirituality” within an ecclesial context. The self-understanding of Church is archetypically realized in Mary. As an individual person called by God and commissioned to become a principal actor in the drama of salvation, Mary is—in Balthasar’s language—liquefied by the Holy Spirit and universalized “to become the principle of all that belongs to the Church.”35 This ecclesial possession, having universal or archetypical character, “Marian spirituality is logically prior to all the differentiation into individual charisms.”36 In other words, “Marian spirituality” forms “the true and universal, fundamental spirit of all the individual charisms.”37 Using the term “charism” to designate a God-given gift to and for the whole Church, spirituality becomes a charism expressing and simultaneously building up the Church. In this sense, Marian spirit in religious life and marriage is “expropriated readiness to serve.”38 “Marian spirituality” is pure readiness, pure transcendence of self, and pure correspondence. For Mary, “with her Ecce Ancilla, . . . is nothing other than the pure ‘feminine’ correspondence to the masculine Fiat voluntas of the New Adam.”39 In a different context, as he was discussing the various Church traditions emerging after Christ’s ascension, Balthasar, after discussing the traditions of John, Peter, James and Paul, recognizes the Marian tradition as the

33 LG, 62.
34 LG, 63.
36 Ibid., 295.
37 Ibid., 295.
38 Ibid., 296.
39 Ibid., 295.

84 FR. JOHANN G. ROTEN, S.M.
first and fundamental one, the tradition which is the ultimate criterion of all other Church traditions.  

Establishing a type of equation between Christian spirituality and "Marian spirituality," Balthasar may have been the most explicit but not the only defender of a "Marian spirituality" in recent times. A. Ziegenaus defined "Marian spirituality" as a "fundamental expression of Christian faith," or, better, as the foundational form of the believer's existence. Mary's intimate connection with the very center of divine revelation, as mentioned in Lumen Gentium (no. 65), constitutes the foundation for the quasi-congruity of Christian and "Marian spirituality" and justifies it. As observed explicitly elsewhere, the Christian can thus be defined as esse marianum, or, to quote a memorable saying by Paul VI, "If we want to be Christians we have to be Marian, meaning we must recognize the essential, vital and providential relationship which unites Mary to Christ, and which opens the way for us that leads to Him."

T. Koehler, in a recent manuscript on spirituality, used more restrictive terminology and spoke of the "Marian dimension of Christian spirituality" or "the way of the Lord Jesus with his mother, Mary." Similarly, E. Llamas-Martinez described "Marian spirituality" as a modality of Christian spirituality, or as a spirituality rooted in Christian spirituality. The question of whether there is a "Marian spirituality" or not was discussed by the French Mariological society in 1972, but they did not reach a convincing consensus. The general opinion was a preference to refer to a "Marian aspect" of spirituality, rather than to propose a "Marian spirituality" as such, since the Church is herself Marian. There seemed to be agreement, on the other hand, that all and any particular spirituality of the Catholic Church necessarily had or needed to have a Marian dimension.

It does not appear that "Marian spirituality" was ever explicitly studied by the Mariological Society of America, with the exception perhaps of Stanley

42 An expression frequently used by Klaus Hemmerle.
44 Theodore Koehler, "Mary and Christian Spirituality" (undated manuscript, chap. IV, 33f.).
46 See "Qu'est-ce qu'une 'spiritualité mariale?'," Études mariales 29 (1972): 121-132.
Parmisano's contribution on Marian devotion in 1989. It is true that this issue was raised more specifically in Redemptoris Mater, as previously noted. J. Castellano Cervera, in his commentary of the encyclical, states the following: The Marian dimension of the Christian spirituality (in Redemptoris Mater) stresses the fact that "true ecclesial spirituality belongs to its 'Marian' profile and thus to the way in which the Church receives, imitates and lives with Mary." Choosing an anthropological approach, Stefano de Flores boldly states: "There exists indeed a 'Marian' spirituality, in as much as there is coincidence, made into a system (or life style), between the spirit of the human person and the spirit of Mary which is totally oriented toward the Lord." "Marian spirituality" leads to a comprehensive Christian spirituality, not least thanks to the intimate and unifying rapport between the faithful and Mary "under the influence of the Spirit."

4. Marian spirituality as Christian Spirituality

Fully recognizing that what is called "Marian spirituality" is the spirituality of spiritualities or the archetype of all ecclesial spiritualities, I would nonetheless caution against the use of the term "Marian spirituality." Yes, we have in Mary the premier and most Christlike (Christoform) of ways to live the Christian message in the project of life, but "Marian spirituality" does not point to the originality of Mary's way, rather it points to the typical way to live as Christians, being itself the archetypical realization of the Christian vocation. Only thus will we be able to implement Paul VI's four orientations (biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, and anthropological) regarding Marian devotion. The common denominator of these orientations is Mary's relation and, simultaneously, her meaning with regard to bible, liturgy, the world of the believers and human nature. On the other hand, there is in "Marian spirituality" something that is essentially and strictly personal—belonging to Mary alone and, therefore, not transmissible and not applicable to any so-called "Marian spir-

50 S. de Flores, Maria, Madre de Gesù (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1995), 288; see also citations in A. Amato, "Il problema della 'spiritualità mariana,'" 25-26 (nn. 61, 63).
ituality.” Only those aspects of Mary’s spirituality which can be understood and lived by all Christians are transmissible and operative.

Renouncing the term “Marian spirituality,” we might do ourselves a service. Terminology has the advantage, or the disadvantage, to specify and separate. As mariologists and Marian devotees, we do not claim exclusivity and separation, but rather a better understanding of Christian spirituality, thanks to the lived and living example of Mary, the first of all Christians. We agree that “Christian” and “Marian” are interrelated, but the designation “Christian” presents more extensivity and communality. It should be an experience of great satisfaction for us to explain that this broad and multi-faceted current of Christian spirituality has evolved from and is alive thanks to a Marian genetic code. By avoiding Marianness, Christian spirituality can embrace two easily forgotten theological realities, indispensable for any sound “Marian spirituality,” namely, the Holy Spirit and the Church. Starkly formulated, it could be said that “Marian spirituality” is ultimately not Marian but ecclesial, that it is not Marian but pneumatological. This applies in particular where “Marian spirituality” is understood as Mary’s formative action on our behalf. It would seem necessary to explain this formative process as the combined activity of Spirit and Church coming to fruition through Mary (action of the Spirit) and in her image (action of the Church).

V. In Mary’s Image and Likeness

We asked: “How can spirituality be Marian?” Let us now rephrase the question and ask: “Why and how is Christian spirituality Marian. The following reflections are offered with the intention to point out some of the riches of Christian spirituality lived in the spirit, the image and likeness of Mary.

1. The Biblical Profile

(1) Trinitarian Configuration

The spirit of Mary is initially and progressively fashioned by the triune love of God. In and through Mary, we understand that God is love—love not perceived as simple sharing, but love as radical and concrete self-giving. Simultaneously, we are led to intuit that Mary’s spirituality is formed by the triune God, and thus has a Trinitarian configuration. It manifests itself in Mary’s faith (Father), hope (Son) and charity (Spirit).

(2) Christoform Personality

We know little about the evolution of Mary’s spiritual life. The best we can say is that Mary’s spiritual life-trajectory moves from an initial and comprehensive (but largely unspecified) “Yes” to God, through stages of progressive concretization of this initial Yes, and further, that all of these forms of concrete consent were made in the service of her Son. They progressively ratify Mary’s station ἐν Χριστω and fashion her Christoform personality.
(3) The dialectics of Virginity and Motherhood

A third aspect, which characterizes and thoroughly shapes Mary's spiritual life-trajectory, is the dialectical interrelatedness of virginity and motherhood, and its spiritual consequences. Her vocation to be Virgin-Mother impressed upon Mary's soul the fundamental spiritual law that fruitfulness is found only is self-giving. It shaped her life and her vocation as virginal mother through the contemplation of her Son's life, Passion, Death, and Resurrection. In Christ's Resurrection, she found the proof and existential certitude that there is fruitfulness in self-giving.

(4) Mission Oriented

The whole person of Mary is mission-oriented. Little or nothing of what we know about her suggests a self-centered and intimist ("private") spirituality. This may be why in Mary we also have the figure of what might be called an anti-spirituality—a life not based on structure, system, objectives and a plan of action. Mary's spiritual life is an anti-spirituality, because it is based on surprise, the unexpected, the sudden irruption of God in her life, which overturned whatever plans she may have made. Her spiritual life was not patterned on a solidly stabilized scala perfectionis, but on her experience that everything is grace and that our answer is docility to the Spirit.

2. A Spiritual Person

Do we have in Mary a model of what Christian anthropology might call a spiritual person? In other words, are there some personality traits or habits which define a spiritual person, and are these qualities archetypically present in Mary?

(1) The laws of receiving and giving

Human development and maturity evolve according to laws of receiving and giving. We do not make ourselves, at least not in the beginning. First, we are receivers, and we build on this initial gift, only to realize that growth and maturity stagnate if we do not become ourselves givers. Call it exchange, interaction, commitment—human maturity, always approximate and difficult to pinpoint exactly, is only achieved thanks to a double relationality which links us to the source of life and, simultaneously, to the end or goal of our existence. All other relations in life explicate, concretize and support, or else invalidate, these two fundamental relations.

(2) The relational character

The essentially relational character of the human person is experiential and tends toward wholesomeness, investing the whole person in as many interpersonal and infra-personal relationships as possible. We find in Mulieris Dignitatem the ultimate practical criterion to judge and guide human relationality: self-realization, it is said there, can only be achieved "through a sincere gift of self."\(^{51}\)

\(^{51}\) John Paul II, 15 August 1988, Mulieris Dignitatem (MD), 7.

FR. JOHANN G. ROTEN, S.M.
The permanent Fiat-structure
All of this means that in Mary's existence, the initial yes grew into a permanent Fiat-structure. True religious commitment, because it was a personal acceptance of God's project for her, had to be steeped in a sense of continuity and finality. In turn, total acceptance of God's call and mission led Mary at Cana, Calvary and Pentecost—to name only the highly visible scenes—to become a gift for others. The readiness to accept, the readiness to persevere, and the readiness to give are the three constitutive elements of the spiritual person.

Incarnational Spirituality
The Fiat-structure of Christian spirituality, as it is typified in Mary, emphasizes the strongly incarnational character of our religious beliefs and behavior. Thanks to this Fiat-structure, the initial and foundational Incarnation of the Word was made a human and historical reality, but in its wake countless secondary incarnations of God's presence in this world were made possible. Thus, Mary's spirituality is typically Incarnation spirituality, and so is Christian spirituality.

3. Formative Presence
It is not possible for us to reproduce the uniqueness of Mary's spirituality. What comes closest to being Mary's spirituality, and is readily available to us, is liturgical spirituality. May we assent that the most “Marian” of all so-called “Marian spiritualities” is founded in the liturgy of the Church? Here we find a spiritual timeline repeated annually and punctuated with the special presence of Mary. This presence is offered to us as two different modes: those of her habitual and exemplary presence. And there is a third one: we call it formative presence.

Habitual Presence
There is first the mode of Mary's habitual presence. Mother or older sister, she is accompanying her follower through the liturgical year, sometimes discreetly, sometimes more prominently. Her role is that of a guide who leads us on a spiritual path through the day (Liturgy of the Hours), to the eucharistic altar and, through the year, the memorial of the various seasons of salvation. Walking with Mary, who walked the same stations before us in faith, we become ecclesial persons, mindful of and practicing with ever greater sensitivity the sentire cum ecclesia. This first mode is her existential mode to exercise “maternal presence.”

Exemplary Presence
The second mode is of a more exemplary nature. There are during the liturgical year the special Marian festivals for remembering and contemplating the person of Mary herself, and in a special way her Immaculate Conception,
Divine Motherhood, and Assumption. These and other Marian feasts are not only opportunities to deepen our understanding and love for Mary (as found in the Scriptures), they also represent the Church's own memory of Mary, fruit of Lex orandi becoming Lex credendi. This is to say that the Church's dogmatic patrimony regarding Mary is not alien to liturgy or spirituality. On the contrary, liturgy is the most integrative and experiential of ways to bind Scripture and Tradition into one, and thus offers the most comprehensive image of Mary possible. Marian devotions complement the liturgy, but not because liturgy lacks spiritual riches. Marian devotions offer the possibility of developing a more individual expression of prayer and worship. Being subordinate to liturgy as to value and significance, and dependent on liturgy for their theological content, devotions highlight the importance of a personally assimilated and sustained spirituality. There exists a rich variety of Marian devotions to support this effort. Authentic spirituality will find a balance in the effective complementarity of liturgy and devotions.

(3) Formative Presence

We are familiar with the notion that Mary's role as spiritual mother is to form Christ in us. How literally should we take this? Should we attribute to Mary a direct and efficient causality in the building up of our Christoform personality, and the routing of our spiritual trajectory?

Could it be said that Mary facilitates the combined action of the Spirit and the Church? The direct and efficient causality of our constitution and growth in the spiritual life is the Church's sacramental activity; she gives us life in the Spirit and cares for it, principally through the liturgy. The Spirit, being the Spirit of Christ, supports the Church's action, directs and critiques it, and has the ultimate transformative power to fashion the New Creation of which we are a part.

Thus, could we say that Mary personalizes the Church's action, and concretizes the Spirit's active presence? Mary, as person, is a constant reminder that our life in Christ depends on the Church and the Spirit. In her, we gather and treasure love, trust, and commitment to the Church. Mary opens our hearts to the Church's "all-embracing motherhood," and at the same time steels our resolve to participate in her task of evangelization. She personalizes our relationship to the Church, and so makes us receptive to her salvific action. Furthermore, Mary has been called the masterpiece of the Spirit. In her, the elusive Spirit has taken form and spiritual excellence. She is not alone in the visible and active work of the Spirit; she is also a conductor of the Spirit's energy, of his light and warmth, attracting and radiating it. Thus, should we call her the ultimate facilitator of our spiritual life? The advantage of this approach would be to avoid any impression of a parallel track of salvation, any suggestion of a special and esoteric Christian tradition for the initiated few. At the same time, it would re-center the person and role of Mary as a link between the Church and Spirit and the individual Christian.

4. Truly Catholic Figure

If Mary is considered the representative of the human race who received God's revelation of salvation for all, she should indeed be recognized as a truly Catholic figure, one with universal theological significance. Mary’s role as ecumenical facilitator is not limited to Christian ecumenism; it transcends Christianity and extends to the world religions (monotheism in particular). But what would be the platform of this universal Marian discourse? When speaking to representatives of other religions, we should refer to the essentials constituting the Marian spirit. Mary can be a truly Catholic figure, if we are able to convey the following four aspects of her being. Mary stands for (1) Absolute priority of God in one’s life; (2) Absolute openness to God’s call and presence; (3) Lifelong endeavor to implement God’s call in one’s life; (4) Active witnessing of the magnalia Dei to all people. What Mary stands for must not necessarily and always be attached to her name.

5. Criterion of Christian Spirituality

Finally, we would like to mention the importance of Mary, or the Marian principle, in determining authentic Christian spirit or spirituality. In the first place, this applies to the Church herself, and was characterized by then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in these terms: “The Church is not an apparatus . . . she is a person. She is woman. She is mother. She is living. The Marian understanding of the Church is the most decisive contrast to a merely organizational or bureaucratic concept of Church . . . . It is only as Marian being that we become Church. In her origins, the Church was not made, but born. She was born when the Fiat arose in Mary’s soul.”

Here are some other aspects of the Christian spirit and reality for which the Marian principle could serve as a form of check and balance.

(1) The Marian principle is a feminine principle, highlighting that all and any spiritual activity must be a responsive one and, as such, of a personal nature.
(2) The Marian principle is dialectical, because it characterizes the Christian spirit as one of self-abandonment and self-transcendence, the two being indissociable as in Mary’s virginity and maternity. Fruitfulness is God’s alone, but it is also a measure of our self-giving.
(3) The Marian principle is a reminder that apostolic dynamism has a maternal configuration. It is essentially the work of the Spirit and its fruit in humanity. We must receive virginally (that is, purely, attentively and wholeheartedly) what is to become fruitful for the Church and the Kingdom.

(4) The Marian principle is a principle of *communion*. It points to the interdependence between vertical and horizontal communion. The *connubium* between God and humanity, individually and collectively, flows over into communion between people. In particular, it enlarges the soul of the faithful to the concerns of the whole Church (*anima ecclesiastica*).

(5) Finally, the Marian principle places strong emphasis on the *analogical* character of the God-human relationship. Mary is the human and real symbol (*Real-symbol*) of finiteness receiving infinity, of finiteness giving itself over to infinity. This occurs in a way which neither absorbs finiteness into infinity nor negates or destroys infinity in the process of meeting finiteness. In Jesus Christ personified, analogy is actualized; in Mary, it is in process and progress.54

**Conclusion**

Kathleen Norris wrote about Mary: “Ever since I first encountered Mary, I have learned never to discount her ability to confront and disarm the polarities that so often bring human endeavors to impasse: the subjective and objective, the expansive and the parochial, the affective and the intellectual.”55 This is true also for the possible impasse opposing the Marian and the Christian. In Mary, the polarity of the Christian and Marian is overcome. In her person, Mary—Our Lady—embodies authentic Christian existence. Here is the reason why Christian spirituality bears the indelible watermark of the Marian spirit. “What is special in Mary’s spirituality is the radical renunciation of any special spirituality other than the overshadowing of the most High and the indwelling of the divine Word.”56 For Balthasar, author of these lines, the attempt to make “Marian spirituality” one among others is a distortion. But since everything in Christianity is from persons, for persons, in the person of Christ, the person of Mary cannot be eliminated from Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality can never be merely generic spirituality. Generic spirituality all too easily falls prey to a non-descript religiosity, itself only inches away from the pitfall of secularism. Mary’s visible and articulate presence in Christian spirituality highlights and simultaneously warrants the deeply personal and active character of our response to the eminently personal call of God addressed to all.

