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## THE VIRGIN MARY AND THE BAROQUE IMAGE

George A. Tavard, A. A.\*

The approach to an ecumenical dialogue on Mary, *Theotokos*, that would pay special attention to the representation of the Mother of Christ as "icon of the Church" needs above all to be clear as to what is meant by icon. I take it that the word has been chosen for what it adds to the more familiar terms, image or picture. However, this supplementary element would need to be described and agreed upon before a dialogue could really proceed on the mystery of Mary as "icon." The interest of Westerners in Byzantine iconography is relatively recent. And it is doubtful whether the Oriental sense and experience of iconography has truly passed into our use of the word (icon), for Latin theology has always been ambiguous about holy pictures. On the one hand, the Second Council of Nicaea has been duly recognized by the popes, and its defense of the cult of the holy icons against the iconoclasts was supported by the decree on sacred images of Session XXV of the Council of Trent (3 December 1563): *Honos qui eis exhibetur refertur ad prototypa quae illae repraesentant, ita ut per imagines quas osculamur et coram quibus caput aperimus et procumbimus Christum adoremus, et Sanctos quorum illae similitudinem gerunt veneremur* ("The honor that is given the images goes to those they represent, so that through the images that we kiss and before which we uncover and bow our head we adore Christ and we venerate the saints whose likeness they bear": DS, 1823).

This calls for two remarks. First, in its Byzantine and Slavic setting, an icon refers ultimately to Christ. Oriental theology

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and the practice of the Orthodox Church relate it to Christ as the divine Light that was perceived on Mount Tabor by the three apostles. The icon-painter hopes that, through and beyond the light that is expressed with paint, the faithful may be imbued with the eternal Light of God in the Spirit. If Mary is an icon, she is, therefore, in keeping with the iconographic tradition, an icon of Christ, who is the Light of the world and the Light of the minds.

Second, the Latin tradition has never fully rejected the doctrine of Gregory the Great in his letters to Serenus of Marseille, that pictures should be kept in the adornment of churches and chapels because they function as catechetical tools for the illiterate. It was along these lines that Thomas Aquinas justified the use of holy pictures without referring to icons as such (S.T., II II, q.94, a.2, ad 1). From time to time an iconoclastic reaction took place: after Serenus of Marseille (6th century), there were the *Libri Carolini* (Council of Frankfurt, 795) with their attack on the Byzantine theology of icons, Claudius of Turin in the ninth century, and eventually the critique of the invocation of saints in the Reformation (*Apology for the Confession of Augsburg*, XXI), and the iconoclasm of the Radical Reformers. In light of this ambiguity of the Latin Tradition, it is right to ask for a "fuller study" of Mary as "icon of the Church," as John Paul II does in *Ut unum sint* (no. 79). Yet, such a study will have to look at several preliminary questions, the first of which should be: What do we mean by icon? And next to it one should ask, Can there be such a thing as an icon of the Church?

Now, if the term *Theotokos* refers to Mary as she carried the divine Word and gave him birth in human flesh, the idea of Mary as icon of the Church presupposes Mary's raising—which I take to be traditionally expressed by the belief in Mary's Assumption and enhanced by the doctrine of her Immaculate Conception.

Yet it should be remembered that the Catholic Church teaches two kinds of Marian dogmas. There are first the patristic doctrines of the Virginity of Mary and the appropriateness of her appellation, *Theotokos*. These were fully accepted by the Reformers, even though, for a multitude of reasons—coming from the critical study of the New Testament, from

modern secular views of anthropology, and more generally from the general waning of Marian piety in Protestant circles, more recent Protestant authors have questioned the first, at least as *in partu* and *post partum*. There are also the dogmas of 1854 and 1950, that are generally rejected in Protestantism, partly because of the manner of their proclamation, but chiefly on account of the silence of the New Testament and of the Church Fathers. In addition, the Immaculate Conception contradicts the belief that all human creatures have sinned, and the proposal of John Duns Scotus, endorsed by Pius IX, that Mary was granted a unique form of Redemption (by anticipation) has not been found sufficiently convincing, in part because the Redemption, while it was in the divine plan, had not in fact been implemented as an action of the Incarnate Lord. This raises questions of Christian anthropology that need further clarification. As to Mary's Assumption, the conclusion of Simon Claude Mimouni, in a study of Marian literature in Syriac and other oriental languages, that the idea of the Assumption of Mary appeared at the end of the fifth century in the Monophysite circles of Jerusalem, during the quarrel between the Severians and the Aphthartodocetes about the natural corruptibility of the body of Jesus,<sup>1</sup> is not likely to make the belief in Mary's Assumption more acceptable in Protestant theology.

Before the ecumenical dialogue on the Virgin Mary goes much further, however, it may be useful to remember some forgotten moments in the development of Catholic thought concerning the Virgin. In the present paper I plan to go back to a generally neglected period of the history of theology, in order to look at a stage in the development of Catholic teaching concerning the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Mother of God. One cannot reject out-of-hand the hypothesis that the more triumphant, if not triumphalist, accents that have been acquired by some Marian reflection since the definitions of 1854 and 1950 have thrown some Marian accents of the past into the shadows. And it is just possible that these accents will open up possibilities for the ecumenical dialogue.

<sup>1</sup>Simon Claude Mimouni, *Dormition et Assomption de Marie. Histoire des traditions anciennes* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1995), 663-74.

I now turn to some largely forgotten authors of the eighteenth century. Although the beginning of the century witnessed the enthusiastic advocacy and systematization by Grignon de Montfort (1679-1710) of the type of personal consecration to Mary that had been inaugurated by Bérulle, the eighteenth century is not generally regarded as a great Marian period. Grignon de Montfort was far from typical. The research I have made in two theologians whose works were widely used in the French seminaries of the time, Honoré Tournély (1658-1729), Regius professor at the Sorbonne and chaplain of the Chapel Royal, and the Vincentian Pierre Collet (1693-1770), shows that the teaching in seminaries was very reserved on the privileges of the Mother of Christ. In addition I have studied the Marian homilies composed, and presumably not preached, by a writer who specialized in biblical and theological oratory, François Thiébaud (1725-1795).

### Tournély

Tournély's *Praelectiones theologicae* . . . , that were unfinished when he died, were intended to form a complete course of theology for seminarians. Tournély had no treatise on the Virgin Mary, but he spoke of her in his tractates on the Incarnation, where he discussed the title *Theotokos* and whether Mary deserved to be the Mother of the Savior; on the grace of Christ (*De gratia Christi*), that led him to discuss Mary's holiness and virginity; and on the sacrament of matrimony (*De sacramento matrimonii*), where he asked if Mary's marriage to Joseph was a true marriage.

In his treatise on the incarnation, Tournély asks a question that is related to the traditional title of Mary, *Theotokos*: "Did the blessed Virgin deserve to be the Mother of God?" (*An beata Virgo meruerit esse matrem Dei?*).<sup>2</sup> This brings about four conclusions, that are treated very fast, in just over two pages. Tournély refers to several patristic sources without citing their texts: Jerome, Epistle 22; Ambrose, On Virginity;

<sup>2</sup>*Praelectiones theologicae . . . de incarnatione* (Paris, 1758), 396 (hereafter *Praelectiones*). I have consulted Tournély's *Praelectiones* in the library of the Grand Séminaire of Montreal, Quebec.

Basil, Homily on the Nativity of Christ; Augustine, Sermon 11 on the Nativity of Christ; Epiphanius, Heresy 78; Bernard, Sermon 4 on the Assumption. Likewise, Tournély does not dwell on theological arguments; he simply indicates their nature. The four conclusions he reaches proceed from the higher to the lower level of merit—*de condigno* coming first, then *de congruo*. At each level of merit the conclusions are presented dialectically, in the form yes/no, no/yes.

The Virgin deserved *de condigno* "that degree of grace and sanctity in which she was chosen to be the Mother of God," for, Tournély explains, "all the conditions of *de condigno* merit converged: holiness in the agent, in the task dignity and liberty, in the Rewarder promise." But this affirmation has to be counterbalanced by a negation: the Virgin "did not merit *de condigno* to be made the Mother of God," for, whatever the excellence of her actions, the Virgin's merits were not infinite, and therefore "not of the same order as the hypostatic union, for neither was there a promise of God nor did the humble Virgin, who was troubled when the angel announced this great gift, aspire to such a dignity."<sup>3</sup> At first sight the second conclusion contradicts the first. Yet this is not really the case, since what is merited *de condigno* in the first conclusion is not identical with what is denied in the second: The Blessed Virgin merited the degree of grace and holiness in which she was chosen to be the Mother of God, but this is not what made her the Mother of God. There was a promise of grace and holiness on God's part, but no promise of the divine motherhood. This remained a pure and totally undeserved gift.

Regarding *de congruo* merit, Tournély holds that strictly and accurately the Blessed Virgin did not merit her divine motherhood. For by definition, *de congruo* refers to something that is commensurate between aspiration and gift. But the Virgin's "actions and acts of piety" were of the same order as ours, and our works of piety are not commensurate with "meriting the divine motherhood." Yet *de congruo* may be taken in a broad sense, as referring to "that which has a certain aptitude to the good to which it is ordered." Then one may say that the Virgin

<sup>3</sup>*Praelectiones*, 397.

merited her divine maternity. The explanation, however, considerably tones down the affirmation, for Tournély understands the broad sense of congruity simply to mean that the Virgin "attained to that degree of grace and sanctity in which she was chosen to be the Mother of God." Two arguments in favor of a more assertive statement are rejected. The objectors, Tournély points out, do not properly distinguish the two senses—strict and broad—of congruity. In fact, he concludes, "The Virgin's actions were oriented to her becoming the Mother of God neither by themselves (*ex sese*) and according to their proper nature nor by her special direction and intention."<sup>4</sup>

### *Sinlessness*

The question of merit is naturally related to that of the human capacity for holiness, and holiness has to do with not falling into sin. In his *Praelectiones . . . de gratia*, Tournély defends the thesis that "no mere human being besides the blessed Virgin has ever abstained from all venial sin."<sup>5</sup> Yet he recognizes that this is not, for St. Augustine, a matter of faith, and, further, that Tertullian, Origen, St. Basil, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. John Chrysostom attribute venial sins to Mary. Depending on the author, these sins were: doubt at the Annunciation, pride at Cana, or despair at the Cross. But, Tournély retorts, Tertullian and Origen carry no weight since their writings are full of errors. As to the others, "they should be abandoned with due respect, for on this point they departed from the church's common teaching and they argued from no legitimate basis."<sup>6</sup> In what I have read of Tournély, however, I have found no discussion of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>*Praelectiones*, 398.

<sup>5</sup>*Praelectiones*, 232.

<sup>6</sup>*Praelectiones*, 242. Answering to particulars, Tournély thinks that Mary's question to the angel at the Annunciation was not an expression of doubt but of prudence and admiration, that Simeon's prophecy did not anticipate scandal or lack of faith but suffering, that at Cana Jesus did not accuse Mary of pride and perhaps insisted that in the matter of miracles he owed nothing to his mother but all to his eternal Father.

<sup>7</sup>This is not to say that Tournély never discusses the question; his writings are extensive and are not easy to find in contemporary libraries! I have consulted Tournély in the library of the Grand Séminaire of Montreal.

### **Mother of God**

In Tournély's theology it is the hypostatic union that introduces the theme of Mary's divine motherhood. The union that is achieved by the incarnation does not bring two parts into a whole. Nor does it amount to the moral unity of two friends, or to the passing union of angels with the bodies which they, as Tournély believes, occasionally assume when they wish to be seen, or to the basic and universal union by which the Creator sustains all creatures in being, or to the mystical union of the faithful with Christ, or to the formal union of Christ with the saints and of God with the temple of Jerusalem, or to the Trinitarian union of the divine persons in one essence. It is "the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the one person of the Word."<sup>8</sup> Tournély concludes: "There is one person in Christ; there is one Christ only; the blessed Virgin truly is and is called *Deipara* or *Dei genitrix*."<sup>9</sup> Both formulas mean "Begetter of God." They correspond exactly to the Greek *Theotokos*: the Virgin was pregnant with God. The more familiar expression, *Mater Dei*, designates the state of Mary after she gave birth to her child. Because she has been *Deipara*, pregnant with God, and because, as *Genitrix*, she has given him birth, Mary is also *Mater Dei*, the Mother of God.

The third part of the conclusion follows from the first two. That Mary is the Mother of God is briefly established on the basis of Scripture. Tournély cites Isaiah 7,14 (*Ecce virgo . . .*), Luke 1,35 (*Quod nascetur ex te sanctum . . .*), Galatians 4,4 (*. . . filium suum factum ex muliere . . .*), and Romans 1,2-3 (*. . . de filio suo qui factus est ei ex semine David secundum carnem*), and he continues with this comment:

In these passages one and the same is Son of God and son of man; therefore the blessed Virgin who conceived the Son of God, is truly and is called Mother of God (*Mater Dei*); not indeed in the sense that she conceived the divinity itself or God as such: nothing more stupid could be thought or said; but in that she conceived him who is at the same time

<sup>8</sup>*Praelectiones*, 400.

<sup>9</sup>*Praelectiones*, 421.



God and man by virtue of the intimate and hypostatic union of the two natures, divine and human, in the one person of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

The argument from the councils is based chiefly on the first three anathematisms of St. Cyril that were read at the Council of Ephesus. The first condemns anyone who does not confess "that Emmanuel is truly God and that because of this the Holy Virgin is Theotokos (for she conceived the incarnate Word of the Father according to the flesh)."<sup>11</sup>

The patristic argument includes the affirmation that "the Fathers declare that the blessed Virgin is *Deipara* or Begetter of God (*Dei genitrix*)."<sup>12</sup> Quotations are provided from Cyril, Theophilus, Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, Dionysius of Alexandria, Tertullian, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen. But it is Tournély's comment that is the most interesting:

In truth the name of *Deipara* cannot be refused to the blessed Virgin without subverting the mystery of the incarnation. For either the son to whom the Virgin gave birth is God, as he is indeed, and then the Virgin is *Deipara*, for she conceived the Son of God who is true God; or he is not true God, in which case the mystery of the incarnation and of human redemption is ruined, and the statement of St. John will be false: The Word was made flesh. And this is the greatest madness of impiety.<sup>13</sup>

The theological reasons are entirely focused on the incarnation of the Son of God and do not mention the Virgin Mary. It is manifest that Mary is never at the center of attention. She is featured as a necessary instrument of the incarnation—no less, but no more.

### Virginity

The question of the virginity of Mary is again part of a broader issue. Under the title, "On the flesh of Christ and what pertains to it" (q.10),<sup>14</sup> Tournély examines problems relating to

<sup>10</sup>*Praelectiones*, 403.

<sup>11</sup>*Praelectiones*, 404.

<sup>12</sup>*Praelectiones*, 405.

<sup>13</sup>*Praelectiones*, 409.

<sup>14</sup>*Praelectiones*, 555.

the docetic conceptions of the incarnation that appeared in the first century. He asks, 1) if "from the Virgin the Word assumed true and solid, or only ghostly, celestial, or ethereal flesh"; 2) if the Word in the incarnation "took to himself all the parts of a human body, including blood"; 3) "how he assumed his body from the Virgin, her virginity always remaining undamaged."

The only one of these questions that is directly relevant to the Virgin Mary is of course the third. This time, the treatment is long and elaborate. Tournély immediately distinguishes the three points of view of virginity *ante partum, vel in partu, vel post partum*.<sup>15</sup> Each has had adversaries. The oldest ones (Cerinthus, Ebion, Carpocrates) denied Mary's virginity before the birth of Jesus: her son, according to them, was conceived from sexual congress like any other child. Later, Jovinian maintained that Mary gave birth like all other ordinary women, "the wall (*claustrum*) of her virginity being broken." Others have affirmed that Mary had several sons from Joseph after the birth of Jesus. The correct thesis is stated thus by Tournély:

The divine Word assumed his flesh from the blessed Virgin, the Holy Spirit working in a totally admirable and stupendous manner, the virginity of his mother Mary remaining perpetual and inviolate, whether before birth, during birth, or after birth.<sup>16</sup>

The argumentation occupies eight pages. Tournély's defense of the thesis is based entirely on the power of God to perform miracles. What happened in the Virgin's womb by the operation of the Holy Spirit was miraculous, astonishing, "beyond the customary law of nature."

From this principle, however, Tournély draws an astonishing thesis: The body of Christ, according to the "common opinion of theologians, was not formed little by little and successively, like the other bodies of ordinary people, but it was conceived and made perfect all at once and in one instant." I cannot say on what basis Tournély sees this as the common

<sup>15</sup>*Praelectiones*, 561.

<sup>16</sup>*Praelectiones*, 552.

opinion of theologians. In relation to the Thomist conception, this would mean that the body of Jesus was not informed successively by a vegetal soul, an animal soul, and finally a human soul: If his body was made perfect "all at once and in one instant," this can only be through the immediate infusion of his human soul. But why such an extraordinary form of Mary's pregnancy? It is in fact not explained. And Tournély does not push the logic of his position too far. Had he gone further he would logically have had to ask a question that was agitated by some commentators of the verses of the Koran that relate the Annunciation: How long did Mary's pregnancy last? If the body of her son was formed instantaneously, it would be logical to conclude that Mary's pregnancy lasted only, as some Koranic commentators suggested, about one hour! Needless to say, the Christian tradition has never taken such a direction. Be that as it may, the reasons that explain and justify God's extraordinary use of his creative power in regard to Mary's motherhood are found, according to Tournély, in the classical doctrine about Mary's virginity.

The "common faith of the church" in the matter of Mary's virginity *ante partum* is based "on its [the church's] authority and on several reasons that are drawn from the church fathers." Tournély lists five reasons.

- (1) Apologetically, the temporal birth of God should be "outside the customary law of nature" to be fully admirable.
- (2) Cosmologically there must be four ways of being born: directly by creation, like Adam; from a man without a woman, like Eve; from a man and a woman, like most humans; from a woman without a man, like Jesus.
- (3) Theologically, the Savior who came to renovate us quite properly entered the world in "a new and unheard of way."
- (4) Ethically, "it was not proper for one son to have two fathers, one eternal and the other temporal; but as he [the Word] had no mother in heaven, as man he must have no father on earth."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>*Praelectiones*, 563.

- (5) Epiphanically, so to say, Christ wanted his birth to manifest "his infinite power and his evidently divine nature." In addition, this had been predicted by the prophets.<sup>18</sup>

This argumentation is a late version of the argument from congruence that is frequently used by the great scholastics. Congruence may be established by logic or esthetics, as in (2) and (4) above. The ideas of (1), (3), and (5) seem to belong more properly to apologetics. The correct doctrine is summed up as follows:

The divine Word assumed his flesh from the blessed Virgin, the Holy Spirit working in a totally admirable and stupendous manner, the virginity of his mother Mary remaining perpetual and inviolate, whether before, during, or after the birth.<sup>19</sup>

Virginity *in partu* is treated chiefly by way of authority: It is affirmed by Isaiah's prophecy (*Ecce virgo concipiet . . .*), the judgment of the church, and "the universal tradition of the fathers, Greek as well as Latin."<sup>20</sup> It is indeed "another stupendous miracle." And the miracle is justified by the analogy between the beginning and the end:

Just as, the doors being closed, Christ entered the Cenacle where the apostles had gathered, and as, leaving the seals of the tomb intact and the stone unbroken and unmoved, having risen from the dead he came out of the tomb, likewise he came from his mother's womb into the light with the wall of her decency and virginity integral and inviolate.<sup>21</sup>

Tourn  y's eight-page defense of the thesis is entirely based on the power of God to perform miracles. What happened in the Virgin's womb by the operation of the Holy Spirit was miraculous, "beyond the customary law of nature." From this

<sup>18</sup>The opposite opinion of Helvidius is rejected with the help of St. Jerome's arguments, and Helvidius's arguments are considered ridiculous: *Quis non rideat ad tam insultam conclusionem?* (*Praelectiones*, 568).

<sup>19</sup>*Praelectiones*, 552.

<sup>20</sup>*Praelectiones*, 564.

<sup>21</sup>*Praelectiones*, 565. The opposite opinion of Origen and Tertullian is rejected as unproven (p. 567-68).

principle Tournély draws an astonishing idea, which he attributes to the common opinion of theologians: "The body of Christ . . . was not formed little by little and successively, like the other bodies of ordinary people, but it was conceived and made perfect all at once and in one instant." Such an extraordinary sort of pregnancy is not explained. Had Tournély pushed his logic further, he would have had to ask a question that has been raised by some commentators of the Koran: How long did Mary's pregnancy last? If the body of her son was produced instantaneously, it would seem correct to conclude that Mary's pregnancy lasted only, as some Koranic commentators have suggested, about one hour! Be that as it may, the reasons that justify God's extraordinary use of his creative power in regard to Mary's motherhood are found, according to Tournély, in the classical doctrine of her virginity *in partu*.

As to virginity *post partum*, it is justified by reference to "the judgment of the church." Mary has always been believed to have remained a virgin all her life. Epiphanius, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and the Council of Chalcedon are quoted to that effect. Tournély also teaches that Mary had indeed taken a vow of virginity, that she was truly married to Joseph, and that Joseph had freely consented to her vow.<sup>22</sup>

In my readings of Tournély, I have found no disquisition on the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption of Mary.

### Collet

Collet, who was a seminary professor for most of his life and was considered Tournély's "continuator," includes a lengthy study of the Immaculate Conception in a tractate *De peccatis*.<sup>23</sup> In chapter 1 (art. 4) the author asks, Who is subject to original sin? There are, Collet notes, two difficulties here, one with

<sup>22</sup>The assertion that Mary did not keep her virginity after the birth of Jesus is rejected on the basis of Scripture (the meaning of *donec* in Matt. 1,25; that of *primogenitus* in Hebrew; and the identity of the "brothers of Jesus," who are, in keeping with Gen. 13,8 and 29,15, his "relatives and cousins" [*Praelectiones*, 570]).

<sup>23</sup>Pierre Collet, *Institutiones theologiae, quas e fusiortibus suis, editis et ineditis, as usum seminariorum, contraxit Petrus C\*\*\* theologiae Tournelyanae continuator . . . opus ad Juris Romani et Gallici normam exactum* (5 vols.; Paris, 1747), t. 1. (Hereafter cited as *Institutiones*.)

some heretics who believe that children of baptized parents do not inherit original sin, one with Catholics who differ on Mary's conception.

Three opinions on the question are recorded. First, Mary was subject to original sin like everyone else: This is "chiefly the Thomists' position."<sup>24</sup> Second, she inherited nothing of original sin (a minority opinion). Third, she was exempt from original sin *quoad actum* but not *quoad debitum*. She inherited the debt, not the stain (the majority opinion). Collet's view is the third one. It is couched in two successive conclusions. First, "the blessed Virgin contracted the debt of original sin." Second, "one must hold for certain that the blessed Virgin was conceived without the stain of original sin." The distinction between debt and stain is explained clearly, even if one cannot find a fully adequate translation of the word *debitus*: "To contract original sin as to the debt is nothing else than to be bound to contract it unless one is exempt from it by special privilege." That Mary was so bound derives from the universality of redemption. Christ being the Redeemer of all, he redeemed her. But one can be redeemed only from something that one owes: "She could not be redeemed unless she was a sinner either in fact or in perspective (*peccatrix vel re vel saltem debito*)." The contracted debt means that if Mary had not been prevented by grace she was destined to sin. She was a sinner in perspective when she was conceived, but she never became one in fact. She was so redeemed by Christ that she was conceived without the stain of original sin. As a daughter of Adam and Eve, she inherited the debt of sin like everyone else, but this debt was cancelled at the very same moment.

There is no need to enter into the details of Collet's argumentation. From Scripture, Collet only quotes Song of Song 4,7, "in its literal sense."<sup>25</sup> In tradition, he discusses Augustine along with several councils and popes. He cites in his favor the definition of session 36 of the Council of Basle, while admitting that "this definition has not the authority of an ecumeni-

<sup>24</sup>*Institutiones*, 1:518.

<sup>25</sup>*Institutiones*, 1:519.

cal council."<sup>26</sup> He also tones down the opposition of Thomas Aquinas to the doctrine: "He undoubtedly would have fought for the Immaculate Conception, had he seen this feast celebrated everywhere with great piety."<sup>27</sup> Admittedly the feast of Mary's conception was not widespread in the thirteenth century, although it had been spreading since the twelfth. *Lex orandi*—and this is the point of Collet's argument—provided no clear witness to *lex credendi*. Yet the idea that Thomas's view would have changed had he seen the feast properly celebrated is of doubtful value, since it runs counter to the very form of the medieval argument against the Immaculate Conception. With Thomas Aquinas, as with his predecessor St. Bernard, there could be no feast of Mary's conception, since her conception, marked by the original sin of Adam and Eve, was sinful regardless of the holiness of her parents and of her own eventual holiness.

As he turns to the Assumption of Mary, Collet notes St. Epiphanius's hesitation about Mary's mortality. Since the time of Epiphanius, however, the Church, Collet reports, has recognized that, since Mary shared the human condition, she must have died, though this was not by martyrdom. Yet there is, he adds, a "difficult controversy" over whether Mary "was assumed into heaven in her body as well as her soul, as the faithful piously believe." The theological reasons pro and con are, in Collet's estimation, extremely weak. One should not argue for the doctrine from the use of the word itself (Assumption), since the liturgical feast in question is also called Dormition, *Pausatio* (Deposition), and *Requies* (Rest), and because the death of the saints is often designated as their "transitus, deposition, slumber, and even assumption." Yet one should not object to the doctrine on the strength of the declaration by many Fathers of the Church that the resurrection of

<sup>26</sup>*Institutiones*, 1:522-23. The authority of the definition of Basle derives, Collet explains, from the authority of the theologians and bishops who were present at the council, from the confirmation of the article on Mary by a synod of Avignon and by the "Academy of Paris" in 1496, from the Roman Pontiffs who have solemnly confirmed the same article and have never opposed it. I have been unable to identify what he calls "the Academy of Paris."

<sup>27</sup>*Institutiones*, 1:523.

Christ is unique: "Christ alone has risen and will not die again." For it is also taught by some of the Fathers that the saints who came out of the tomb at the death of Christ never died again; they were truly "resurrected into immortality." Among those who share this opinion, Collet mentions St. Hilary, St. Epiphanius, and, curiously, Cornelius Jansen (d.1638), bishop of Ypres, former professor at the University of Louvain, whose book *Augustinus* (published posthumously in 1640) had marked the origin of the Jansenist movement. Both sets of arguments are so weak that Collet approves the recommendation of the medieval theologian Pierre de Blois (d.1200), whom he quotes: One should teach Mary's Assumption with modesty, "as an opinion, not as an assertion." Collet was writing this in full knowledge of King Louis XIII's vow in thanksgiving for the birth of his son, the future Louis XIV, that all parishes in the kingdom of France would organize a procession every year on the fifteenth of August.

### François Thiébaut

François Marie Thiébaut was a canon of the diocese of Metz in the Province of the Three Bishoprics. In 1749, he became professor of biblical studies and of church history at the St. Simon Seminary in the city of Metz. From 1754 to 1762, he was rector of the seminary. Then, when the seminary amalgamated with the older seminary of St. Anne, he became the pastor of a church in the city. Much of his time, however, was devoted to writing and publishing homilies. His works include fifteen volumes of an *Explication . . . de l'ancien testament* in the form of homilies, sixteen volumes of homilies on the New Testament, and four volumes of homilies on Christian doctrine.

Thiébaut was himself a convinced partisan of the theory that pastors were instituted by Christ, and that they succeed the seventy-two disciples as much as bishops succeed the twelve apostles. He even wrote a pamphlet on the question during a quarrel with his bishop. He had claimed total jurisdiction, as the pastor of their parish, on a convent of sisters; the sisters had complained to the bishop, Cardinal Louis Joseph de Montmorency-Laval (1760-1802), and the cardinal had taken their side. Thiébaut's form of conciliarism was close



to that of his contemporary, Febronius, penname of a suffragan bishop of the archdiocese of Trèves, Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim (1701-1790).

At the beginning of the Revolution, Thiébaut was elected by the clergy of Metz, in April 1789, as one of their deputies to the Estates General of the kingdom. He soon resigned this post, as he disapproved of the libertarian trends of the assembly, notably of the project to legalize divorce. In January 1791, he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, that was required by the Constituent Assembly of the Clergy who held official positions. Later he signed a manifesto against the Civil Constitution. In October 1792, he fled into exile over the German border. He died on 8 April 1795, at Elsenfeld-am-Main in the Rhineland.

### *The Immaculate Conception*

Thiébaut wrote a homily on the Immaculate Conception. The text chosen for this homily is the verse *Fecit mihi magna qui potens est* (Luke 1,49). Admiration for kings and conquerors is manifest in the preacher's very first words. What are the great things that God has done for Mary? In the first place God made her come from "a long line of famous kings and conquerors, . . . from the most ancient and illustrious house in the whole world."<sup>28</sup> In the second place, greater still were God's doings in bringing about her Immaculate Conception. Divine providence sheltered this "daughter of Adam" from "this torrent, this deluge of iniquity that has flooded the rest of humankind,"<sup>29</sup> and she "responded perfectly" to the designs of providence: "The Almighty has done great things for Mary at the moment of her conception . . . Mary has done great things for God. . . ."

The rest of Thiébaut's discourse is focused on two points. The first emerges from the reflection that sin is "the greatest evil," so great that "a God-man alone could atone for it" and "God alone can punish it." But Mary was "preserved from original sin," a truth that can be established from "Scripture,

<sup>28</sup>Thiébaut, *Explication littéraire*, 4:417 (hereafter, *Explication*).

<sup>29</sup>*Explication*, 4:419.

the Fathers, the Councils, and reason itself."<sup>30</sup> The scriptural proof is given by the Holy Spirit in the Song of Songs<sup>31</sup> and in the book of Esther.<sup>32</sup> The Fathers are represented by Ambrose and Augustine. The Council of Trent is cited. But Thiébaut gives pride of place to rational proofs. It would be, he argues, injurious to God's power and wisdom to think otherwise. Mary's soul was preserved for the sake of the body from which the Savior would "take the material of his own."<sup>33</sup> There is additional evidence in the fact that the Church honors the Immaculate Conception of Mary with a liturgical feast, for, Thiébaut proclaims, "the Roman Church can neither institute nor celebrate a feast, except of something that is evidently holy."

This was in fact a reversal of the argument of St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas against celebrating the conception of Mary: Because it was tainted by sin it cannot be celebrated! But they all admitted the celebration of Mary's Nativity. And, Thiébaut comments, what Aquinas said in his time of Mary's holiness at her birth (it is celebrated liturgically) applies now to her conception. It is celebrated; therefore it is true. Thiébaut asks rhetorically, "Although [the church] has defined nothing on the point, is it not easy to see in what direction it leans?" One cannot deny the doctrine, he continues, without "contradicting the church's intentions and practices."<sup>34</sup>

In practice, Mary's Immaculate Conception means that what happens to the faithful when they receive the gift of faith in baptism was given to Mary at her conception, so that she entered this world already "as heir of heaven, daughter of the Most High, the greatest work of the Almighty."<sup>35</sup> One could say, though this is not Thiébaut's formulation, that Mary's creation,

<sup>30</sup>*Explication*, 4:424.

<sup>31</sup>Thiébaut quotes, "Come, my dove, you who are spotless," and his footnote refers to the Song of Songs without specifying the verse. It seems to be a compilation of 4,7 ("You are beautiful, my beloved, and with no blemish at all") and 4,8 ("Come from Lebanon . . .").

<sup>32</sup>Esther 5,1.

<sup>33</sup>*Explication*, 4:427.

<sup>34</sup>*Explication*, 4:428.

<sup>35</sup>*Explication*, 4:431.

justification, and sanctification were one and the same action of God. "Her first sanctification . . . is higher and more elevated than the holiness and perfection of the other saints." Indeed she was not preserved from "poverty, humiliation, sufferings, human calamities, but from sin."<sup>36</sup>

The second point amounts to a systematic depiction of the greatest possible sanctity, that was in Mary's thoughts and actions. Unfortunately, the very genre adopted by Thiébaud leads him to extravagances. From her very conception, he affirms, Mary had neither concupiscence nor ignorance. She was "as intelligent at the moment of her conception as Eve at the moment of her creation."<sup>37</sup> Somehow it does not strike Thiébaud as odd that an embryo—Mary at her conception—should be equal in intellect to an adult woman, as Eve was at her creation according to the common understanding of Genesis 2,22–23. In any case, he believes that from then on Mary grew in merit, and that at every moment of her life she received from God "the fullness of actual graces." Thiébaud briefly surveys some of these moments: the Presentation, when, at three years of age, "she already knew the price of virginity";<sup>38</sup> the Annunciation, the Visitation, and some other recorded events of "holy history": the flight to Egypt . . . , Cana . . . , the cross. . . . After a diatribe against the present worldliness of Christians and their unrealistic wish to enjoy the world while also keeping God's grace, Thiébaud assures his readers that it is possible to imitate Mary's sinlessness. By grace, anyone of the faithful can avoid, not only all mortal sins and all deliberate venial sins, but even every single one of "the venial sins that come by mere surprise and simple fragility," though not all of them. But then, Thiébaud asks, "What one cannot really avoid, would it be a sin?"<sup>39</sup>

Thus Thiébaud joins a high doctrine of sin, the greatest evil in the world, and a contradictory high doctrine of the quasi-universal possibility to avoid it. This paradoxical view of grace

<sup>36</sup>*Explication*, 4:432.

<sup>37</sup>*Explication*, 4:434.

<sup>38</sup>*Explication*, 4:440.

<sup>39</sup>*Explication*, 4:439.

and sin may well come from a reaction against Jansenism and its excessively pessimistic view of the fallen state of human nature. I assume that Thiébaud's source was the theology of Tournély, although the preacher does not make quite the same point as the theologian. Two conclusions were enunciated in Tournély's treatise on grace. Firstly, *homo justus potest ex privilegio speciali et auxiliis gratiae extraordinariis omnia vitari peccata venialia*<sup>40</sup> ("By a special privilege and extraordinary assistance of grace a just man can avoid all venial sins"). But, secondly, *nullus homo purus praeter beatam Virginem abstinuit unquam ab omni peccato veniali* ("No man besides the blessed Virgin has ever refrained from all venial sin"). For the academic theologian, total sinlessness is possible to anyone, if the necessary grace is given by God, but no one has actually received this grace besides the Virgin Mary. For the pastoral theologian and preacher, all sins, mortal and venial, can be avoided by grace, with the exception of a few faults of fragility that are not truly sins. Because she was totally preserved from sin, Mary can be presented as the greatest instance of the power of divine grace. And because it is theoretically possible for all Christians to abstain from all sins, she can be taken also as a model for imitation. No one can start where she started, but all can, by grace, join her where she is.

One should remember at this point that Thiébaud's understanding of the Immaculate Conception was of course arrived at before the definition of 1854. There is no reference in his sermon to a redemption by anticipation or to the argument of John Duns Scotus in favor of the Immaculate Conception. Rather, the theology that underlies Thiébaud's teaching joins a maximalist view of sin and a minimalist view of its consequences in sinful humanity. This understanding of the Immaculate Conception does give Mary a special place in the acts of God. Yet it leaves intact her fundamental situation as a full member of sinful humanity. In fact, Thiébaud's homily on the Assumption repeats the point: Like all children of Eve, Mary "incurred the obligation of original sin," although she was also preserved from the sin at the very moment when she incurred

<sup>40</sup>Tournély, *Praelectiones . . . de gratia* (1758), 231-33.

its obligation. In this case, however, Mary was not separated from the rest of the holy people by her Immaculate Conception. All men and women, including the Mother of Christ, have incurred the obligation of original sin. Mary alone was preserved from the sin itself. By grace and faith, however, anyone may arrive at the very degree of sinlessness where she was placed by the singularity of her conception. Thiébaud, however, does not venture any guess as to the number of saints who have reached such a level of holiness.

### *The Assumption*

Thiébaud's homily for the Assumption of Mary is of great length. It is inspired by the first verse of the epistle of the feast, taken from Apocalypse 11, 19, as it still is today in the first reading of the mass: *Apertum est templum Dei in coelo*. . . . As the orator informs his audience, the text refers to Mary in its "historical and fundamental sense," while in its "literal and prophetic sense" it refers to the church.<sup>41</sup> Thiébaud is now going to reverse the perspective, applying to Mary what is true of the Church; for every doctrine, he points out in fidelity to Thomas Aquinas's methodological principle, must be based on the literal sense. He will do this with the purpose of showing both Mary's glory—that it may be praised and desired, and her holiness—that it may be imitated.

The feast of the Assumption celebrates three things, "Mary's precious death, her glorious resurrection, her triumphant assumption."<sup>42</sup> In keeping with his belief that Mary did incur the obligation of original sin, Thiébaud dwells on the death of Mary. Some pious authors, he admits, have thought that she never died, and he erroneously attributes this view to St. Epiphanius. Yet this, he adds, "has never been the common opinion among the faithful."<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, "the church has thought that the sentence of death against the children of Eve was general and without exception." Since Jesus suffered

<sup>41</sup>Thiébaud, *Explication littérale, dogmatique et morale de l'Apocalypse, en forme d'homélies* (Metz, 1783), 16:221 (hereafter, *Explication* 16).

<sup>42</sup>*Explication*, 16:223.

<sup>43</sup>*Explication*, 16:224.

death, so did his mother, and all the more so as "she had incurred the obligation of it by incurring that of original sin, and divine providence could preserve her from the latter without preserving her from the former."

Yet Thiébaud attempts to reconcile these views. "Let us admit with the church that Mary died, in the sense that when she reached the age of seventy-two (as is believed) her soul truly left her body."<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, "let us add that she did not die, in the sense that we die only insofar as death separates us from some creature that we cherish in this world, and death did not separate Mary from anything that she loved on earth." While on earth Mary was already "dead to all creatures." She loved God only and totally. Furthermore, she died by love of God: "This is how death entered Mary; it was love that caused it, that drew it in, that forced it to exercise its power." Mary died "in God's love, . . . for God's love, . . . by God's love, her last breath being a perfect act of love."<sup>45</sup>

Thiébaud locates Mary's death in Ephesus.<sup>46</sup> He accepts the apocryphal story that in answer to Mary's wish all the apostles were present at her death, and that three days after her burial they found her tomb empty. How they got to Ephesus, however, "is a point of history that," he says, "we will not try to explain."<sup>47</sup> He accepts it "on the testimony of Nicephore who cites Juvenal, bishop of Jerusalem." The preacher then acknowledges that "her anticipated resurrection is not an article of faith," yet "it is at least certain." This certainty comes from tradition. Thiébaud cites Augustine (in fact, some sermons by a pseudo-Augustine), Bernard, Ambrose, Jerome. He argues with them that Mary's Assumption is announced in Apocalypse 12 and in other scriptural texts. Mary has been

<sup>44</sup>*Explication*, 16:225.

<sup>45</sup>*Explication*, 16:226. The text actually repeats twice (*pour l'amour de Dieu*); I presume that the second instance is a misprint: *pour* should be *par*.

<sup>46</sup>This location was popularized in the nineteenth century by the German visionary, Anne-Catherine Emmerich. Yet the remote origin of the belief may be found at Ephesus itself, in an attempt to replace the Ephesian tradition centered on the great temple of Artemis with a legend centered on a church dedicated to the great Mother of the Lord (Mimouni, *Dormition et Assomption* . . . , p. 585-97).

<sup>47</sup>*Explication*, 16:227.

raised "above the angels by the preeminence of her dignity, above the greatest saints by the merits of her virtues, above all creatures by the scope of her power."<sup>48</sup> As a result, she "takes possession today of the empire of the universe; she is established under Jesus Christ as channel of graces, mediatrix of the faithful, hope of sinners, protectress of the just, resource of peoples and kingdoms, queen of heaven and earth. . . ."

### *The Rosary*

As an afterthought to his fourth and last volume of homilies on "the first part of our work on the New Testament," Thiébaut composed a homily on the rosary. It was an afterthought because the feast of the Rosary, instituted in 1572 by Pius V in thanksgiving for the victory of Lepanto over the Turkish fleet, was not authorized in the kingdom of France before 1776. This new celebration, Thiébaut recorded, "reminded us of our former purpose to write a discourse on this solid and salutary devotion."

The homily takes the form of a commentary on John 19,26 (*Ecce mater tua*). The skill of the orator lies largely in the way he combines the theme of spiritual motherhood with the actual prayer of the rosary. When they—the people of the Church—"adorned their hand with a rosary," Thiébaut tells his audience, "a close alliance was formed" between them and the Virgin Mary. They chose her, "the most tender of mothers," as their "lady and mistress, their advocate and patroness, their queen and mother."<sup>49</sup> In return she numbered them "among her servants, her clients, her subjects, and her cherished and beloved children." Thiébaut notes that the rosary includes the creed once, the Lord's prayer sixteen times, the "angelic greetings" one hundred and fifty-three times, and the doxology after each decade.<sup>50</sup> A commentary on the Hail Mary follows, in the course of which the name of Mary is explained: It means both "Lady of the universe" and "Star of the sea."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup>*Explication*, 16:237.

<sup>49</sup>*Explication*, 4:ii.

<sup>50</sup>*Explication*, 4:iv.

<sup>51</sup>*Explication*, 4:v.

One ought to pray the rosary because, "divine in its nature, the rosary is so too in its effects."<sup>52</sup> At this point, Thiébaut launches into a triumphalistic encomium of the Virgin's power, a power that appears to be singularly bellifere. The rosary, we are informed, vanquished the Albigenians in the thirteenth century, St. Dominic being the first preacher of it—although some authors, the homilist admits, report that it was the Dominican Alain de la Roche. At any rate, the rosary also won the naval battle of Lepanto against Selim II in 1570. Long descriptions of battles are given. For the rosary also won other battles against the Turks, with Emperor Charles VI in 1716, and in Corsica some time later. It triumphed against the Huguenots, when Cardinal de Richelieu, as minister of Louis XIII, took the city of La Rochelle, their chief stronghold (28 October 1628), after a siege of one year and a half. The rosary, Thiébaut also affirms without providing further details, is known to have stopped fires, floods, and earthquakes.

Having impressed his audience with the triumphant sound of Mary's mythical victories, Thiébaut calls attention to the rosary's more spiritual effects. Since it was instituted by the Church for meditation on the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries, its main effects are spiritual. Thiébaut elaborates on these mysteries and explains the three names by which the devotion is known. As "rosary," it is a crown of roses presented to the Queen of heaven. As "psalter of the simple faithful," it takes the place of the biblical psalter that was often used by the faithful as late as the tenth century. As "chapelet" (usually, yet improperly, translated as "beads"), it is a *chapeau* (a hat) made of roses. As to the fifteen recitations of the Lord's prayer that are part of it, they correspond to the biblical psalms of ascent, and as such they symbolize the ascent of the People of God to Jerusalem, which is an image of the "soul's gradual ascent to the Lord."<sup>53</sup>

The homilist regrets "the malice of our separated brothers," the "injustice" of certain Catholics who are not devoted to

<sup>52</sup>*Explication*, 4:ix-x.

<sup>53</sup>*Explication*, 4:xxiii.



Mary and who find the rosary boring, the contempt of "the man of the world" for popular devotion, and the claim that it is stupid to "congratulate Mary for mysteries that took place so long ago."<sup>54</sup> In contrast, popes and kings have practiced and recommended this prayer. Yet recitation alone is not sufficient. If it were done "without attention, without taste, without feeling, with impure lips and a soiled heart,"<sup>55</sup> such a prayer would be abuse, presumption, illusion, or superstition. The rosary must be preserved. Yet one should also correct the "ignorants who abandon the spirit and cling only to the letter."<sup>56</sup> Thiébaud's twofold principle is clear. Prayer and contemplation must be joined to practice and the imitation of the saints. "Let us celebrate the praises of the Son and the Mother, but at the same time let us follow these beautiful models. . . ." <sup>57</sup>

### ***Ecumenical Reflections***

One may well wonder at this point, How does this evocation of prerevolutionary Marian theology and piety relate to the ecumenical movement today? How can it throw light on the present dilemma of the churches when they face the question of Mary? More pointedly, Is it at all relevant to the presentation of Mary as "icon of the Church"?

In the first place, it is never inopportune to be reminded that the Catholic tradition on Mary is more varied than it seems, even—or, I would say, especially—after the definitions of 1854 and 1950, and that there may be neglected strains in it that are not so far from some of the basic concerns of the Protestant Churches.

In the second place, the remarks made in the eighteenth century about the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption have themselves something to teach us. The Immaculate Conception, it is commonly objected today, seems to enshrine the Virgin outside the common stream of humanity. Yet, responsible theologians have taught, not only that Mary

<sup>54</sup>*Explication*, 4:xxvi.

<sup>55</sup>*Explication*, 4:xxv.

<sup>56</sup>*Explication*, 4:xxvi.

<sup>57</sup>*Explication*, 4:xxviii.

herself was redeemed in a unique way, as was said in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, but also that, as a descendant of our first parents, she was born into sinful humankind in such a way that she inherited the debt of sin. If she did not suffer from the stain of it, this can only be because she received a purely gratuitous prevenient grace, for the sake of her Son, and by his own action of taking her debt on himself as he took the sins of humankind.

A caution should be added. Whatever its direction in the past, Marian thinking has never been far from the Bible, given the general practice of allegorical exegesis, especially in commenting on the Song of Songs. We may be concerned today about the inadequacy of such a reading of biblical texts, yet we should also be eager to experience the catholicity of the Church in time. As it includes all times and places and cultures, the catholicity of the universal Communion over space and time implies respect for the way the biblical text has spoken to past generations, whatever our preferences and sensibilities today.

As to the Assumption, the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Statement of 1982, *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, clearly saw that Mary belongs in the communion of saints. Precisely, the idea of Mary's Assumption into heaven originated as an amplification of her Dormition. The *Theotokos* fell asleep in death (Dormition) like everyone else, and she was commemorated in the beginning in a general memorial that was often placed in proximity to the feast of Christmas. The commemoration of martyrs, however, commonly remembers the day of their martyrdom, when they were called to God and reborn in the company of heaven. Celebrating her Dormition placed Mary among the martyrs and saints. In the total absence of relics, however, and in ignorance of the location of her tomb—pilgrim stories that placed it near Jerusalem or, later, in Ephesus notwithstanding, the celebration of the memory of Mary came to be identified with the day of her ascent to the Lord. And as the process of amplification continued, this ascent was described as the raising of her soul and body to paradise, with or without a resurrection. It is

only at the end of this raising that Mary in heaven can be seen as an icon, the icon of the Church, as many today like to say.

Our eighteenth-century authors affirmed the Assumption of Mary into heaven, even if one of them did it with extreme moderation, yet they did not see Mary as an image or an icon of the Church. Indeed, they saw her as a model for imitation, a model who is in the Church for those who are her sisters and brothers, even as they praise and address her as Mother. As to being also image in the sense of "icon of the Church," the ideal image in prerevolutionary imagination was the Baroque image. Architects and artists of all sorts applied it to their vision of the Church. Equally distant from the stark naïveté of the Romanesque, the subtle folds of the Gothic, and the depth of the Byzantine icons, the Baroque image, even when it was under the control of the French classical style, so multiplied lines and accumulated artifices that it found its high point in the *trompe-l'oeil* of Rococo, and then imaging veered on lying. No wonder that the French Revolution, in search of stoic "virtue," destroyed images and statues with the same enthusiasm that they put into throwing away the relics of the saints! It would need the massacres of the Revolution, the provisional glory and the final disaster of the Napoleonic wars, and the esthetic reaction of the Romantic movement to change the perception of images and to begin to recover an authentic sense of spiritual symbols. It would then take the achievements of the liturgical movement to allow the Byzantine icons to reenter the horizon of Western Christianity, though not always in ways that are congenial to Orthodoxy.

The Mother of Jesus, *Theotokos*, brought the Son of God into a world of sin. She herself was fully involved in the human condition, and as such she is a model for all believers. The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption depict her also as an image of what human creatures should have been but were not, and of what the believers aspire to be on the last day, in the eschatological transformation of all things. These perspectives need to be explored jointly, in an ecumenical dialogue that will not lose sight of the humanness of the young Jewish mother of the Savior, who was made *kekaritomene* for the sake of her Son.

As, following the example of Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, the ecumenical movement hopes to erase from the midst of the Church and to commit to oblivion the mutual condemnations of the past, the dialogue partners should look carefully at the entire tradition of Marian doctrines, in order, when they are ready, to reformulate them in a manner that is mutually agreeable.