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Johann G. Roten
University of Dayton

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MARY'S MISSIONARY CHARISM

Johann G. Roten, S.M.*

The title of this presentation as announced in the Program ("Mary, Matrix of Ecclesial Identity: The Role of the Virgin in the New Evangelization") is somewhat misleading. It reproduces the title of an article published in *Marianum* (2011) in French.¹ That article studied the role of Mary in evangelization since Vatican II, primarily in magisterial documents. However, the leading interest of the article was the question of how Mary is active in evangelization, and whether her role makes her to be an efficient agent or not.²

Elaborating on this very question, I have revised the title of this paper and would like to offer three reflections. The first of the three asks the *why* question: Why does Mary present a noticeable missionary charism? The second reflection takes stock of some historical situations throughout the history of evangelization in order to explore the *how* question: How does the person and work of Mary impact—real or intended impact—on evangelization? The third reflection will develop some foundational criteria to support, direct, and sustain the missionary charism of Mary in the present.

I did not want to repeat the beautiful things that have already been said at this meeting about Marian theology in general and the theology of evangelization in particular. My

*A Marianist priest, Father Roten is the Director of Research, Art, and Special Projects for the Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute (ML/IMRI) at the University of Dayton. In addition to his IMRI faculty responsibilities, he leads and oversees the exhibits and activities related to the ML/IMRI's Art Gallery and Crèche Museum.

¹ J. Roten, "Marie 'Matrice de l'Identité Ecclésiale.' Le rôle de la Vierge dans l'évangélisation," *Marianum* 73 (2011): 257-328.

² Ibid., esp. parts VII and VIII which deal with Mary's ongoing and fundamental presence in the Church as well as with the efficacy of that presence for the new evangelization (307-328).

ambition for this paper is modest. I would like to focus on what can be termed *intermediaries of evangelization*,³ meaning the many factors and instruments which translate and transform a clean and full-fledged theology into a living and palpitating faith, kicking and screaming at times but fundamentally faithful to its original intent. And so I will engage, temporarily at least, in a pact with history and the social sciences.

I. Mary's Missionary Charism

What makes Mary the powerful cultural and, thus, missionary figure she is known to be? Why the countless titles, shrines, and customs? How do we explain the thousand faces of Mary? Why her quasi-universal presence both in- and outside the Catholic Church and the Christian world?⁴ I would like to point out three factors, different and complementary, which have impacted and still greatly contribute to lend Mary a highly visible profile and a noticeable influence on evangelization.

A. The Incarnational Factor

Incarnational theology most naturally forms a pact with cultural reality. Where the divine claims to become visible and present, as it did in Jesus Christ, culture will be the name of its cradle and home. Thus, Mary's person stands tall and highly visible on the incarnational threshold of the Christ event. There is no way to avoid her, she must be reckoned with.⁵ She is literally

³ These *intermediaries*, a term common enough in and for inculturation, are mainly bridge-building elements highlighting communality between old and new. Metaphors, even better symbols, have such function. Their flexible and malleable reality allows for the transfer of values from one culture to another.

⁴ The recognition of Mary's power is not waning in the present even if it may not always be affirmed for the right reasons, and with the true Mary figure in mind. See Ruth L. Miller, *Mary's Power: Embracing the Divine Feminine as the Age of Invasion and Empire Ends* (Newport, OR: Portal Center Press, 2011), 260: "Whatever we call the Mother-presence, the Comforter; however we relate to her; She is here, now, inside and around each and every one of us. She works in union with the active, masculine Father-presence that also surrounds and enfolds us—so we may become, at last, fully human."

⁵ Mary's presence in Church and theology is so obvious and sometimes so matter-of-fact that we take her person for granted to the point of forgetting and ignoring her status and stature. As E. Farrugia put it: "The air we breathe is inconspicuous precisely because it is so central." This may be the reason for the modesty "which characterizes

culture made individual person and mother into which the Trinity incarnates itself as Jesus Christ. She is the co-incarnational figure to reckon with wherever the mystery of Christ is object of cultural transfer, reassessment and inculturation. The understanding of the Christ event⁶ as ongoing incarnation invariably makes of Mary a witness, a guardian, and sometimes a victim of missionary challenges.

Tradition often calls her the mirror of God. Maracci's *Polyanthea Mariana* lists more than one hundred references to Mary as the mirror.⁷ We are not talking of an impersonal and static mirroring of the *magnalia Dei*. Incarnation understood in anthropological perspective operates according to a model of receiving and giving, meaning playing out the laws of life both biological and spiritual.⁸ Here lies the secret of Mary's incarnational impact and thus her missionary appeal. Her whole life is based on the sincere gift of self, her call to exist for others, and so to become gift. In the words of *Mulieris Dignitatem*: "... man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is called to exist for others, to become a gift."⁹

the reserve with which we speak in public about our parents and with which Scriptures speak about Christ's Mother." However, the spontaneous reserve adopted when paying respect to Mary should not diminish the importance to be accorded to mariology: "Many have nothing to say about Mary. This is, in part, much to be regretted, as Mariology is a test-case of balance in theology; precisely of that sense of beauty and integration, sometimes badly missed among professional theologians . . ." See Edward G. Farrugia, "First Thoughts about Mariology, Second Thoughts about Sophiology," in *Fons Lucis: Miscellanea di studi in onore di Ermanno M. Toniolo*, ed. R. Barbieri, I. M. Calabuig, O. Di Angelo (Roma: Edizioni "Marianum," 2004), 647-648.

⁶ It is of import to evangelization to understand the Christ-event as universal *concretum*. Where religious philosophy from Socrates to late Platonism adhered to a God who is infinitely superior to all apparitions found in the world, Christianity perceives God as the one who steps "forth onto the world stage as a particular and special character vis-à-vis other particular and special characters" (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* [5 vols; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988-1998], TD2:189). It is the *concretum* which makes Incarnation to be not only a Christ-event but also a Marian one.

⁷ J. Bourassé, *Summa Aurea de laudibus Beatissimae Virginis Mariae* (13 vols.; Paris: Migne, 1866), 7(sec. 1): 293-299.

⁸ Recent developments in theology accord central importance to the notion of gift as we find it in the sacramental hermeneutic and the icon-God in Jean-Luc Marion's various writings, prominently so in his *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁹ MD, 7.

B. The Compensatory Factor

The exiguity of historical information about Mary presses our theological inquiry about her into the narrow channels of authenticity, and limits the scientific discourse to a search for the essentials about her person and role in salvation history. Eminently missionary thanks to her role at the incarnation, there is, in fact, little information to describe and evaluate Mary's human and cultural profile. But since *nature* abhors void or vacuum,¹⁰ nature compensates, meaning we create our own Marian contraptions, more or less in tune with Mary's original persona.

Let me offer an example. Christian tradition is filled with witnesses and attestations to the physical beauty of Mary. This happened notwithstanding St. Augustine's stern warning: "Non novimus faciem Virginis Mariae."¹¹ Ambrose was one of the first to take exception. He was more generous than Augustine in attributing physical beauty to Mary, but referred it to the beauty of her soul, and saw in her outward beauty the expression of her virtues.¹² Venantius Fortunatus offered a dazzling description of Mary's beauty couched entirely in light symbolism.¹³ Centuries later, Richard of St. Laurent ventured a detailed description of the physical aspects of her person, and St. Antoninus managed a scrupulous transposition of St. Albert's aesthetic criteria to the face and body of the Virgin Mary.¹⁴ These examples, and many others, show how prominent a role natural and spiritual curiosity have played in deciphering the mystery of Mary.¹⁵

¹⁰The famous *horror vacui*, a postulate attributed to Aristotle, according to which incipient void in nature is immediately filled with denser surrounding materials, finds its pendant in art history and historical biography. In art history it is called "fear of space" and leads to the so-called geometric style. Ancient historiography remains largely silent on the specific traits and events of individuals. The biographical compensation occurs when fame sets in or when modernity takes over. See, e.g., Marcel Schwob, *Les vies imaginaires* (Paris: Charpentier, 1896), 4f.

¹¹*De Trin.*, 8, 5, PL 42, 952.

¹²*De Virg.*, lib. 2, cap. 2, PL 16, 220.

¹³*In laudem S. Matris Virginis*, PL 88, 281.

¹⁴*De laud. B. M.*, lib. 5, caps. 1 and 2.

¹⁵For the broader art historical and theological context of these observations, see J. Roten, "Mary and the Way of Beauty," *Marian Studies* 49 (1998): 109-127.

There is thus a need for cultural representations of Mary. We do not have any visual and noteworthy biographical materials about her person and life. This situation favors the need to create them, and it leads people, generation after generation, to seek for models and patterns of her life and person. The many cultural representations of the person of Mary—from Byzantine empress to Our Lady of Fair Love, to the militant Queen of Heaven of the Post-Reformation period, on to the ethereal and remote image of the nineteenth century, and the archetype of the Church of Vatican II—have been adapted and readapted to a great variety of incarnational needs and expectations. Multicolored verbal and visual representations of Mary are not detrimental to the original and essential message, as long as they are not absolutized at the expense of Mary's historical singularity and the doctrinal unity of theological reflection about her. Indeed, they are loaded with great missionary potential.

C. The Human Archetype

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of Mary's missionary significance is of an apparently non-theological and even non-religious order. There exists a close connection between Mary, the mother of God incarnate and redeemer of humankind, and the universal archetype of mother and of motherliness. Life, human life, is our first and ultimate concern. Life is received, and becomes a matter and challenge of survival at all cost. Values such as care, protection, acceptance, growth and affection are paramount to the *struggle for survival*, psychologically as well as biologically and morally. The archetype of the mother is a universal archetype of the human psyche. Its significance and importance are transcultural, meaning common to all human beings. This puts Mary, the "mother of life eternal," in a uniquely privileged position to promote and sustain Christian evangelization and inculturation.¹⁶

¹⁶ Literature on motherhood is abundant, exploring the many facets of this theme from philosophy and ethics (see Sarah LaChance Adams and Caroline R. Lundquist [eds.], *Coming to Life: Philosophies of Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Mothering* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2013]) to writers and poets (see Karen J. Donnelly and J. B. Bernstein [eds.], *Our Mothers, Our Selves: Writers and Poets Celebrating Motherhood* [Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1996]). Andrew Harvey, inspired by Scripture

The conclusions of a not-so-recent sociological study about Mary and youth tend to confirm the observations made regarding the importance of the human archetype. An international study comprising 6,000 respondents indicated that there exists three potential types of relationship between the respondents and Mary. The first and, statistically, by far the most important type of relation reflects the *affective* relationship between the respondent and Mary. It is centered on Mary's maternal characteristics understood as acceptance, protection, dependability, warmth, gentleness, and love. In the second place we find a relation of *admiration* based on the qualities of Mary's excellence and superiority, and in third position the relation of an *imitative* type, one based on perceiving Mary as a model. The maternal character is not perceived as primarily theological, as mother of Jesus Christ or mother of the Church. Mary is present as a mother; *tout court*, she is caring and concerned with our needs; she is a special friend, lovable and loving. She listens, has patience, and pardons. Mary is a second mother, someone who makes one think of one's own mother.¹⁷

The arguments offered here so far to describe Mary's missionary charism may not have been of a strictly and explicitly theological nature. However, the connection with the proper theological foundation can easily be established for all three factors. It is obvious for the first of the three, the incarnational factor. The compensatory factor, rightly understood, leads the observer almost invariably to what we might call the *mystery of Mary*, the domain of her life and person forever shrouded in the intimacy between her and her God. And here lies the true meaning of compensation. The reflection on Mary's mystery leads to ever new ways of praising and praying, intuiting and recreating the *magnalia Dei* as they appear in Mary. The human archetype of motherliness and affection is both theological and anthropological; the two aspects are inseparably united in the one reality of creation and re-creation, that is in the one plan of God for the whole world.

and mythology, intuiting and pleads for the return of the mother (see his *The Return of the Mother* [New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001]).

¹⁷ J. Roten, "The Virgin Mary as Known by Youth, as Taught in Colleges and Seminaries: Two Sociological Studies," *Marian Studies* 45 (1994): 182-184.

We humbly and graciously accept that in the end it will be in the hands of God to establish his kingdom. Meanwhile, it will always be an important part of evangelization to seek a new harmony between the secular and the sacred, the natural and the supernatural, between religion and culture. Most urgently, this new harmony should promote and sustain the recuperation and retrieval of the sacramental character of human existence and the eschatological orientation of our destiny, meaning the two great challenges of contemporary evangelization.¹⁸

Indeed, incarnation and expectation of salvation, the double thrust of Christian reality is both sacramental and eschatological. This thrust develops a sacramental sensitivity with regard to the created order of reality, and labors to fashion human expectations according to the eschatological orientation of our nature. Christian life and culture, and with them evangelization, wither and dry up if and when the *expectation and experience of salvation* no longer inspire and guide our missionary endeavors.¹⁹

II. A Typology of Mary's Evangelizing Charism

Let us now turn to the second reflection to take stock of some concrete examples of evangelization with Mary. These examples could be misunderstood as sociological *case studies*. They are not. They were not elaborated on the basis of sociolog-

¹⁸ It is an important part of rightfully understood evangelization that its deontology be not limited to a facile concept of adaptation or re-adaptation. It is part of ongoing Incarnation to present a dynamic and progressive character of evangelization "in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented." See *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), 44, as quoted in the International Theological Commission's *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria* (Rome, 2011), 52.

¹⁹ Eschatological orientation and sacramental sensitivity are both integral to a comprehensive theology of Incarnation. John Paul II, in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, gave new meaning to these two fundamental orientations and dispositions. Our eschatological fulfillment is characterized as *holiness*, initiated in baptism, constantly nourished in the eucharist, and renewed in the sacrament of reconciliation (NMI, 32-37). The harmony between the temporal realities and those of the spirit is established and brings fruit in *charity*, the pope's personalized version of sacramental sensitivity. Being home and school of communion, the Church manifests its sacramental reality to be sign and instrument of the intimate union between God and the world. See LG, 1; NMI, 43ff., 49.

ical investigation and verification. Nonetheless, they represent a modest attempt at *typologizing* what might be called evangelization with Mary. In this presentation the typical references to Mary's place in evangelization concern her *person* as evangelizing presence, *culture* as human and spiritual enrichment, *action* as apostolic dynamism, and *truth and love* as human and spiritual synthesis embodied in Mary's person and mission.

A. Mary's Person as Evangelizing Presence

Our first example deals with a missionary representative of the thirteenth century and highlights the *person* of Mary. The second example is from the seventeenth century and illustrates the importance of the relation between evangelization and culture. Our third example refers to the nineteenth century and Mary's importance for apostolic dynamism and the restoration of faith. Finally, a contemporary model of Marian evangelization attempts to show the exemplary character of Mary for an adequate and concrete understanding of Christ, Church, and the human person.

There is the case of *Raymond Lulle* (1232-1316), a layman, philosopher and theologian.²⁰ Called sometimes the Saint Paul of the Middle Ages, he developed a vast philosophical and theological program with the Virgin Mary at its center. Reality for Lulle is an immense network of interdependent relations within which the created world is called to manifest the grandeur and goodness of God. This theological reading of the cosmos occurs on two levels. The created world is not only a reflection of the divine being, it is also the manifestation of *divine activity*; it is *actus divinus*. Thus, the realities of this world, all beings, are modalities of God's presence to the world.²¹

Divine being and action are eminently manifested in the person of Mary. According to Lulle it is in her person that we find the ultimate sign and significance of the reality of God. It is in

²⁰ L. Badia and A. Bonner, *Ramón Llull: vida, pensamiento, y obra literaria* (Barcelona: Sirmio, 1993), 9-67.

²¹ "Tout l'immense système combinatoire de son Art n'est que la recherche d'une méthode, d'une logique qui rende possible l'intelligibilité de la foi." R. Sugranyes de Franch, "Conclusion," in *Raymond Lulle et le pays d'Oc*, Cahiers de Fanjeaux, vol. 22 (Toulouse: Privat, 1987), 310.

Mary that divine action expresses itself most perfectly. Mary is the quasi-logical outgrowth or consequence of God's active dynamism. The goodness of her person literally inundates the whole world. Created by love, she becomes in turn source of love. Her grandeur gives new stature to humanity, and aggrandizes those who love her. In a most special way, the dynamism of her faith constitutes the very foundation of the Church's faith. In Lulle's own words:

In Our Lady . . . we have the foundation of holy Catholic faith; all articles of faith and all sacraments are grounded in the faith of Our Lady.²²

It was Lulle's missionary intent and program to announce and disseminate the Marian message in order to recreate the human person. For Lulle this philosophico-theological program is contained in the invocations of the *Ave Maria*, the Hail Mary. Missionary endeavor, every missionary act, begins with the praise of Our Lady (*Ave Maria*). This activity takes its very reason and motivation from the contemplation of the one who is "all grace" (*gratia plena*). It is further motivated, supported, and nourished thanks to an adequate knowledge of Mary's role and person expressed in the invocation *Dominus tecum*. The message of *who* Mary is, meaning the blueprint of her recreated human being, shall be announced with the courage and intrepidity of the knight and the martyr, that is with steadfast pride and a total gift of self. And, of course, all missionary activity culminates in Jesus Christ, the *Benedictus fructus ventris tui*.

To prepare missionaries for this Marian-centered evangelization, Lulle built in 1275, and thanks to the generosity of King James, the famous missionary monastery of *Miramar* on the island of Mallorca in the Mediterranean Sea. The program of formation, though prepared and supported by Lulle's philosophical and theological teaching, was summarized in the simple words of the *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis*, inviting the missionary to simplicity, adaptation, and concentration on the

²² R. Llull, *Das Buch über die heilige Maria = Libre de Sancta Maria: Katalanisch-deutsch*, ed. Fernando Dominguez Reboiras and Blanca Gari (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2005), XXXIV.

essential, meaning the eschatological dimension of human existence.²³

Lulle's ambition had been the conversion of Islam, an order too tall for one person. We may ask the question: Was his method realistic enough to be efficacious? It contained some of the most important aspects of any kind of evangelization: solid philosophical and theological foundations, the spiritual motivation, the personalist context, and the simplicity of content and expression, all of it announced with the courage of the knight and the perseverance of the martyr. Most important, it all comes together—foundation, motivation, content and expression—in the one person of Mary. We find in Lulle what *Lumen Gentium*, 65, expresses: that Mary is an "abridged formula of faith," that she is John Paul II's "living Catechism" or "synthesis of faith," Pozo's "crucible" or "melting pot," and Scheffczyk's "exponent of faith." It is the direct and simple reference to her *person* which summarizes not only the whole theology of evangelization but also its essential methodology.

B. Culture as Human and Spiritual Enrichment

The second case study takes us to the Philippines where Mary is *Ang Mahal na Birhen*. She is *Our Beloved Virgin*, which makes the Filipinos *Bayang Sumisintá kay Maria* or *Pueblo Amante de Maria*.²⁴

History accounts for some moving details on how Mary was first introduced to the Filipinos. Magellan discovered the Philippine islands on March 16, 1521. A first Mass was celebrated on Filipino soil on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1521. The kings of the islands and their men, at Magellan's invitation, attended Mass. After Mass, Magellan and his entourage planted what became the famous Cebu cross, and prayed a *Pater Noster* and *Ave*

²³ R. Lulle, *Das Ave Maria des Abtes Blanquerna* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1954), 7-58.

²⁴ Reynaldo Adaled, O.P., "A *Pueblo Amante de Maria*: Mary's Mediation and Filipino Marian Devotion," in *Mary at the Foot of the Cross VII: Coredeemtrix, Therefore Mediatrix of All Graces. Acts of the Seventh International Symposium on Marian Coredeemption. Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima, Fatima, Portugal, July 9-11, 2006* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2008), 393-401. —This article confirms the ongoing and deep devotion of the Filipino people to Mary, which makes it a people "in love with Mary." An old Spanish eucharistic song is titled: "No mas Amor que el Tuyo!"

Maria.²⁵ In a gesture of courtesy Magellan gave the Rajah of Cebu a rosary. Here is how historian Miguel Bernad relates the event:

The Rajah [Humabon] stood up and they dressed him in the robe. They took the native head cloth off and put the red bonnet on his head. The rosary they first venerated by kissing it devoutly themselves and asking the Rajah to kiss it. The Rajah in a gesture of reverence took the rosary beads in his hands and put them for a second upon his head. He then allowed them to put the rosary about his neck. Whether or not the Spaniards or the Cebuanos appreciated the symbolism, there was something symbolic about the ceremony. The rosary replaced the gold chain; the red cap took the place of the native headdress; and the Rajah's nakedness [except for his loin cloth] was clothed in purple and yellow silk.²⁶

Rajah Humabon later asked to be baptized together with his men. The baptism took place on Sunday, April 14, 1521. A total of 500 men and 300 women were baptized on that day. The Queen of Cebu and her ladies were baptized in the afternoon. On this occasion, Magellan presented her with three religious objects. As Pigafetta relates:

... We conducted her (the Queen of Cebu) to the platform, and she was made to sit down upon a cushion, and the other women near her, until the priest should be ready. She was shown an image of Our Lady, then the very beautiful wooden Child Jesus, and a cross. Thereupon, she was overcome with contrition and asked for baptism amid her tears.²⁷

Magellan exhorted the Queen, and her ladies in waiting, to honor and value these icons, and "to keep them in place of her idols."²⁸

We are well aware of the frequently problematic, and sometimes dramatic, combination of christianization and colonization

²⁵ G. F. Zaide, *Philippine Political and Cultural History* (2 vols.; Manila: Philippine Education Co., 1957), 1:114.

²⁶ M. Bernad, *The Christianization of the Philippines: Problems and Perspectives* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1972), 2. The color purple and yellow are reminiscent of the Spanish national colors.

²⁷ Pigafetta cited in Zaide, *Philippine Political and Cultural History*, 117.

²⁸ Ibid. (citing Pigafetta), 117.

throughout history. Wherever Christianity survives and thrives in likewise situations, it will survive and thrive mainly because of the personalizing appeal and liberating character of its message, its social call and eschatological perspective, and the communion of love of its members. All of these characteristics are gathered in the person and mission of Mary, lending her a formative and inspiring quality.

This model, typical of the first wave of post-medieval evangelization, illustrates the fact that mission is seldom only mission. In most of the known historical situations evangelization is inseparably linked to civilizing and cultural endeavors. The red bonnet on the Rajah's head, and the rosary beads around his neck were not only symbols of cultural promotion, but also the status symbols of power and riches, cultural novelty and technological advancement. Which leaves us with the question: How incarnational and cultural does our faith, and thus our evangelization, need to be? What does Catholicism today have to offer in terms of civilizing advancement and cultural riches? Is a Marian culture the answer of the moment, meaning a culture of life—life received, life treasured, life shared and given—a culture of life which is not only spiritual but has biological, psychological, social, and political ramifications?

C. Action as Apostolic Dynamism

The so-called century of Mary (1830–1950) begins with *Romanticism*²⁹ and leads to restoration of faith in France and other countries of Europe. Romanticism contributed to greater religious sensitivity thanks to the rediscovery of the aesthetic dimension of religion, the re-evaluation of affectivity, the consecration of the personal and subjective aspects of religion, and the amplification of the social dimension of religion.³⁰ All

²⁹ Maria Pia Paoli, "L'età moderna tra pietismo, illuminismo, romanticismo," in *La Figura di Maria tra fede, ragione e sentimento: . . . : Atti del XVIII Simposio Internazionale Mariologico (Roma, 4-7 ottobre 2011)*, ed. S. M. Maggiani and A. Mazella (Roma: Edizioni Marianum, 2013), 51-54.

³⁰ Romanticism has frequently been qualified as reactionary and ambiguous. This seems to be the law of history. Every period in the history of ideas develops out of a reaction against the previous period based on new insights for what is considered a new and better future. Postmodernism is a reaction against modernity, but not only!

four of these aspects had a specific impact on the representation and place of Mary in Romanticism and the Restoration. Conversely, the image of Mary restored and consecrated the symbolic and visual character of religion (aesthetic dimension), accentuated the *intimiste* (intimist) understanding of the spiritual life (subjective dimension), retrieved the affective dimension of religion, and gave it a pronounced social orientation.³¹

Romanticism seeks beauty, and finds it in the *Madonna of Raphaël*, endlessly copied and interpreted by Pre-raphaëlites and Nazarenes alike. This image of Mary attempts universal significance; it connects culture and religion, bridges heaven and earth, and marries nature and the intimacy of family life. Romanticism projects a very public and highly visible image, both religious and secular.³²

It is compensated by a more *intimist representation of Our Lady*, highlighting the subjective expression of religiosity. The *intimist* image of Mary reflects the importance of spiritual interiority and the psychologization of religious life. It leads to

The call for freedom, so prominent in the Enlightenment, is re-assumed by postmodernism but reinterpreted for a new context of heightened social and affective sensitivity. The characteristics of Romanticism presented here may not be exhaustive. Their goal is to offer an ideological context for a better understanding for the Marian movement of the 19th century. See, e.g., U. L. Lehner and M. Printy (eds.), *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Traditions, vol. 20 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010), 12ff. For the development of the Marian movement during this period, see Th. Koehler, *La storia della mariologia dal 1650 all'inizio del '900* (Vercelli: Centro Mariano Chaminade, 1974), 129ff; Stefano De Fiores, "Il culto di Maria nel contesto culturale dell'Europa occidentale dei secoli XIX e XX," in *De cultu mariano saeculis XIX-XX: Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani Internationalis in sanctuario mariano Kevelaer (Germania) anno 1987 celebrati* (7 vols.; Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1991), 1:11ff.

³¹ For a more comprehensive description of the four traits and their Marian connection, see J. Roten, "Culture et théologie mariales dans la période romantique et le piétisme," in *La figura di Maria tra fede, ragione e sentimento*, 56-121.

³² The literature on this topic is legion and can be verified not only in Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, the Nazarenes, Epinal, and Beuron, but also in the countless holy cards of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. As pointers, see M. B. Frank, *German Romantic Painting Redefined: Nazarene Tradition and the Narratives of Romanticism* (Aldershot, Hants; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001); A. Vircondelet, *Le monde merveilleux des images pieuses* (Paris: Hermé, 1988), 67ff.

a pronounced psychological identification with Mary, as can be found in John Claud Colin (1790–1875), and the multiplication of personal consecration to Mary, omnipresent in most religious congregations.³³ The typical reference here is that of the *eternal woman, ideal and sublime, remote but attractive*, elevating spirit and soul.

The affective dimension finds a natural expression in the image of the *mother*.³⁴ She is mother of God, but at the same time and with growing importance the spiritual mother—as can be shown in the works of theologians like Ventura, Nicolas, Jeanjacquot, Laurent, and Scheeben. The symbol which best expressed affectivity was that of the heart. Together with the Immaculate Conception, the symbol of the heart became the principal visual and spiritual reference of numerous religious foundations, for example, those of de Clorivière (1735–1820), Chevalier (1824–1907), Coudrin (1768–1837), Libermann (1804–1852), Claret (1907–1870), and others.

The social dimension of nineteenth-century Marian culture created its own symbol or image of Mary. It was the image of the strong women, inspired by the symbolism of Genesis 3.15. We recognize in it the militant woman, who promises “*nova bella*,” who gathers under her banner a new militia thrown into battle against the serpent.

It is at this juncture that we find the most dynamic and prominent expressions of Marian evangelization. The Restoration is the time of great individuals, men and women of action, mainly, but also spirituals and mystics. The great individual is a pure product of Romanticism, endowed with a strong- and independent-minded personality, he or she has a pronounced social sense and organizational charism. These individuals

³³ See among others: L. Scheffczyk, *Maria, Mutter und Gefährtin Christi* (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich, 2003), 232ff.; R. Laurentin, *La consécration aujourd'hui. À Dieu par Marie* (Paris: De Guibert, 2001), 50ff. The *intimist* representation of Mary has not only religious but also cultural roots, as can be seen in S. Michaud, *Muse et Madone. Visages de la femme de la Révolution française aux apparitions de Lourdes* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 25–27.

³⁴ For this part, see sec. 6.3. Le réveil théologique: de Möhler à Scheeben, in J. Roten, “Culture et théologie mariales dans la période romantique et le piétisme,” in *La figura di Maria tra fede, ragione e sentimento*, 95–101.

(e.g., Champagnat, Chaminade, Jaricot and Lamourous, Vianney and Görres, Cottolengo and Bosco) are founders and restorers of faith.³⁵ Men and women of apostolic and missionary action (in Europe and foreign countries), their interest is neither an elaborate intellectual system nor a complex theological synthesis. The novelty of their foundations is to offer their members a *theology of life* to which they gave the name of spirituality. This spirituality conveys a *spirit*, a spirit which motivates action, apostolic action, and sustains the pursuit of personal sanctity. For a number of these foundations the principal motor of mission will be the name and mission of the Immaculate Conception, frequently in tune with an eschatological concept of history. Their works concentrate on education (schools), social and charitable endeavors (hospitals, orphanages, . . .) and the foreign missions in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Recent developments in religious sociology tend to establish a parallelism between the period of Restoration and the contemporary situation of the Church, making a case for a Romantic revival to overcome the pitfalls of both modernity and postmodernity.³⁶ The question should be raised: Is there a need for more symbolic-aesthetic, affective, and *intimist* religiosity? In particular, do we need a new Marian dynamism to overcome apostolic lethargy?

D. Truth and Love as Spiritual Synthesis³⁷

The fourth example takes us into the present, to Mary as *equilibrium of faith*. Benedict XVI's understanding of Christ-

³⁵ A typical example of the spirit of this period can be found in G. J. Chaminade, who summarized his theological and apostolic creed in these three points: (1) Importance of a mentality of faith and of prayer of faith; (2) insistence on the doctrine of the mystical body and Mary's spiritual maternity; (3) the importance of apostolic zeal. This Chaminadean synthesis was presented by Th. Koehler, based on the *Manuel du Servant de Marie*, Q. M., nos. 21-22, 17-20, in his dissertation: "La Bienheureuse Vierge Marie dans le Plan Divin" (thèse de doctorat en théologie, Fribourg, 1943), 142.

³⁶ Wilhelm Schmid, *Philosophie der Lebenskunst. Eine Grundlegung*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1385 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 21-27.

³⁷ Many ideas exposed here are taken from my article on Ratzinger ("Mary, 'Personal Concretization of the Church': Elements of Benedict XVI's Marian Thinking") in *Marian Studies* 57 (2006): 242-321, esp. 265ff.

ian truth and Mary's place and role therein is a call for incarnate truth, for concreteness and concretization of the Christian message. The famous "intermediaries" are not limited to culture and psychology; they regularly appeal to knowledge and understanding. Is evangelization able to give us a cohesive view of world and God, a mental home, a synthesis for mind and life? We find such an attempt in Ratzinger's theology.

Benedict XVI—then still Josef Ratzinger—in one of his noted interviews, contrasted Augustine with Scholasticism: "Scholasticism has its greatness, but everything is very impersonal. You need some time to enter in and recognize the inner tension. With Augustine, however, the passionate, suffering, questioning man is always right there, and you can identify with him."³⁸ What is being said here about one person, Augustine, and the appeal of his personal destiny and thought, somehow applies for Benedict to the perception of Christianity as a whole.

Benedict XVI echoes Balthasar's own obsession with the incarnational concreteness of Christianity: "In all other religions the finite is seen sooner or later to point beyond itself, to be an intermediary . . . For the Christian, however, the positive and the concrete persist to the end, and isolate him from the rest of mankind."³⁹ In Ratzinger's perception "it is only in Christ and through Christ that the discourse about God becomes truly concrete: Christ is Emmanuel, *God with US*—the concretization of the *I AM*."⁴⁰ Already in his *Introduction to Christianity*, this concentration on concrete truth as the truth of all truths is found: "The meaning of all being is no longer to be found in the sweep of mind . . . in the world of ideas . . . ; it is to be found in the midst of time, in the countenance of one man."⁴¹

³⁸ Ratzinger and Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium: Joseph Ratzinger, an Interview with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 61.

³⁹ Quoted in Joseph Ratzinger, "Christian Universalism: On Two Collections of Papers by Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Communio* 22 (Fall, 1995): 548.

⁴⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, "La nouvelle évangélisation: Conférence du Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger lors du jubilé des catéchistes," *La Documentation Catholique*, no. 2240 (21 janvier 2001): 94.

⁴¹ *Introduction to Christianity* (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), 141.

A second domain where concretization is overwhelmingly present deals with ecclesiology. Ratzinger's ecclesiology centers on the eucharist, for in the eucharist "ecclesiology is fully concrete while at the same time fully spiritual, transcendent and eschatological."⁴² Eucharistic ecclesiology is, in Ratzinger's opinion, a faithful synthesis of Vatican II's most important intentions regarding the doctrine on the Church. Ratzinger's understanding of ecclesiology which, according to him, is identical with communion ecclesiology,⁴³ suggests and includes therefore as a further element the idea of the "biblical philosophy of love," or spousal relationship. The concretization of the Church as spousal gives added importance to the progressive and ever-new realization of its unity in and with Christ.⁴⁴

There is a third context where concretization leads to more explicit personalization of theological reality. We are referring to the domain of anthropology, more specifically to the notion of person in theology. Speaking about freedom and liberation, Ratzinger established the following anthropological parameter: "A correct vision of man . . . must proceed from a relationship in which each one remains a free person and is joined to the other precisely as such. It must be a doctrine of relationship and seek a type of relationship that is not a means-end relation, but the self-giving of persons."⁴⁵

According to Ratzinger, the human person is "the event or being of relativity." We discover in these developments the notion and reality of *being for*—an expression which had been used to summarize the essence of Ratzinger's theology—and the ultimate reason for this overall tendency toward theological concretization and key to an authentic pedagogy of holiness. This is what evangelization needs to give us: person as relation, Church, the body of Christ, and Jesus Christ as the

⁴² Joseph Ratzinger, *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens: Kirche als Communio* (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2002), 114.

⁴³ *Church, Ecumenism, Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroads, 1988), 7.

⁴⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte. Grundorientierungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 142.

⁴⁵ "Freedom and Liberation: The Anthropological Vision of the Instruction 'Libertatis Conscientia,'" *Communio* 14 (Spring, 1987): 61.

universale concretum. The quest for truth and love has led Benedict XVI to see in Mary more than herself. According to him she points to the truth about Jesus Christ, to the truth about the Church, and about the human person. She represents an equilibrium of faith put before us as model and challenge. In Ratzinger's words reported by Robert Moynihan: "If the place occupied by Mary has been essential to the equilibrium of the faith, today it is urgent, as in few other epochs of Church history, to rediscover that place. It is necessary to go back to Mary if we want to return to that 'truth about Jesus Christ,' and 'truth about the Church,' and 'truth about man.'"⁴⁶

Recent sociological inquiries regarding the concrete and successful impact of the new evangelization in some European countries attribute high marks to the following means of apostolic endeavor: the icon, the feast, pilgrimage, small groups, and mass-manifestations or gatherings.⁴⁷ The icon appeals to the visual blend of contemporary culture; the feast liberates people from daily monotony and meaninglessness; the pilgrimage reproduces the reality of human existence as journey, giving it direction and purpose; the small group allows for a certain human and spiritual intimacy and heightens Christian identity. Finally, mass-gatherings highlight the need for the individual to be part of a greater whole, and thus to experience a special form of universality.

III. Foundational Criteria for Evangelization with Mary

The third reflection, announced at the onset as criteria to support, direct, and sustain the missionary charism of Mary, would like to highlight some of the conditions to be met to enter more readily and fully into the spirit of Mary as evangelizer. Evangelization is a collaborative effort, as was plainly

⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, *Let God's Light Shine Forth: The Spiritual Vision of Benedict XVI*, ed. Robert Moynihan (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 103.

⁴⁷ A. Delestre, *Les religions des étudiants* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 61-113; Henri Tincq, *Dieu en France. Mort et résurrection du catholicisme* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2002), 205ff.

shown and documented in the four historical and typological case studies presented. There are three aspects to be pondered: a special method to be adopted, a new consciousness to be developed about the anthropological status as Christian, and the challenge to be transformed into what some theologians call the *altera Maria*.

A. Retrieval of Wisdom Tradition

To overcome a purely positivist understanding of theology there is need for the retrieval of an existentially grounded and encompassing religious sensitivity. According to a sapiential understanding of theology there is no split between theology and spirituality, between sitting and kneeling theology. Faith leads to understanding, and deeper understanding to greater faith, both alternating and growing constantly. Faith is a constitutive element of theology, because it is only in the light of faith that we can truly see the glory of God and the splendor of his manifestation in Jesus Christ. Evangelization leads to the discovery of the love of God for humanity, and its realization in everyday life.

From a theological point of view, the following methodological consequences apply:

1. Christianity is based on the primacy of descending theology, not only historically but also systematically. In the language of the *via pulchritudinis* there is no visible form of God without revelation, no splendor of form without the priority and primacy of divine form-giving causality. This does not amount to a dismissal of ascending theology, which points to the importance of the visible form without which there would be no focal point for divine radiance in time and space.
2. The sapiential perspective is a much needed antidote against the fragmentation of theology. Cultural reflection about Mary, with its need of inculturation, tends to favor a certain particularism and even divisiveness. The sapiential tradition attempts to overcome positivistic or cultural fragmentation and compartmentalization. It is a call for synthesis, as we find it in the *via pulchritudinis*, the deep-seated conviction that there exists, not only intentionally but also really, a convergence in life toward a maximum of meaning and significance. Sapiential theology helps to heal wounds inflicted by limited and controversial views of theology, and resituates partial views of Mary within her global and trans-historical context.

3. The sapiential tradition affirms and protects the *mystery* dimension of God and his revelation, that is, the quasi-innermost core of the Christian to which Mary belongs. The ultimate answer to *Virgo Immaculata* and *Assumpta* lies in the realm of mystery. There is nothing facile about mystery. *Lumen gentium*, for example, describes Mary's perpetual virginity as a personal *habitus* that was not "diminished but consecrated" in childbirth.⁴⁸ The phrase says in unmistakable terms that the birth of Jesus is shrouded in the cloak of God's intimacy and grace. The formulation of this truth is a prime example of the *via pulchritudinis* or theological aesthetics. It both *affirms* and *protects*—an eminently missionary challenge—leading simultaneously to a greater depth of God's own hermeneutics and a deeper understanding of Mary's mystery.

B. Centering Evangelization on the "New Being" as Christian

Redemption as we understand it offers a new look on the whole person, its anthropological status and various human dimensions. We would like to mention them to highlight the importance of theological anthropology for a rightful understanding of evangelization. Indeed, attention should be attracted to the revival of the *imago Dei* theology which constitutes the essential bridge between redemption offered and redemption received and, thus, of its human potentialities and consequences. A recent document of the International Theological Commission offers a comprehensive and updated view of the *imago*-theology.⁴⁹ Understood as theological meditation, the document mentioned ponders "the doctrine of the *imago Dei* to orient our reflection on the meaning of human existence in the face of a multitude of these challenges."⁵⁰ We share with Mary in the image and likeness with God. So do those—*mutatis mutandis*—we approach in our efforts of evangelization. Thus, the following characteristics of our common anthropological make-up should be an integral part of what we called in this article the "intermediaries" of evangelization, but not only. They are

⁴⁸ LG, 57: "non minuit sed consecravit."

⁴⁹ International Theological Commission, "Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God" (Rome, 2002). Hereafter referred to as CS.

⁵⁰ CS, 2.

also an integral part of both preamble and epilogue or, better, of the formal and final cause of evangelization.

1. The Optimistic Understanding of the Human Person

One of the corollaries of the *imago Dei* theology is an *optimistic* understanding of the human person, not least because of "our transformation into the image of Christ."⁵¹ The positive view of human beings has profoundly marked Catholic culture, culminating ultimately in its secularized form as human rights for every human being. More important in this context is the missionary dynamism triggered and indefatigably sustained by this positive and optimistic view of the person for him-/herself, in relation to others and to God. Mary is the star example, not only for the personal value of her person (Immaculate Conception) but also for the way in which she deals with others: she is *mediatrix*, and she is the compassionate one.

2. The Analogical Understanding of Reality

Our self-understanding, as well as our relation with God, is based on the analogical understanding of reality. The analogical configuration of reality predicates a participatory relationship between God and the human person which allows for similarity, while recognizing the still greater dissimilarity between the two. In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council: "For between the Creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them."⁵² Our understanding and present use of *analogia entis* does not stop at proportionality between God and the human person; it attests participation, as mentioned, not least because of Jesus Christ being himself the ultimate realization of the *analogia entis*. However, the very foundation of the elevated stature of the human person, sometimes rendered as divinization, cannot be found but in the love of God for his creature. The practical consequence takes on the name of being in the image and likeness of God.⁵³

⁵¹ CS, 13.

⁵² Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 806.

⁵³ See Thomas Joseph White, *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2001).

3. *The Axiological Understanding of History*

Christianity operates with an axiological understanding of history. We see and recognize in Jesus Christ the beginning of the "fullness of time,"⁵⁴ a new and definitive beginning of history in Jesus Christ. The role of Mary is that of the dawn to prepare the rising of the Sun of Justice. The Christian understanding of history is allotting time and its significance a definitive character. History has a definite trajectory leading forward not backward, anticipating and preparing the fullness not of time anymore but of being. History has a second important meaning. It is the place and the opportunity to build the Kingdom of God, in other words to work at the transformation of time, understood as neutral and non-descript, in order to make it into the quality time the religious language defines as holiness and charity. Here, Mary assumes the role of companion along our own timeline and as guardian of sacred time.

4. *The Eschatological Teleology*

Another tangible gift of redemption comes with the label of *eschatological teleology*, the expansion of history into eternity, the fulfillment of time in a transhistorical present. One of the most important cultural challenges of Christianity is the widespread loss—in North Atlantic culture in particular, but not exclusively so—of a clearly articulated eschatological finality of human life. Mary, the eschatological icon, loses essential aspects of her truly cultural mission if we deprive her of her maternal presence, the model character of her person, and the eschatological dynamism of her being—never better illustrated than in her Assumption.

5. *The Ontological Concept of Ethics*

Christianity promotes an ontological concept of ethics. The foundation of the moral life is found in the *imago Dei*, meaning the *imago Christi* more explicitly. Our moral life finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the concrete norm. He fulfilled the will of the Father, that is everything that must be done in this life, and he did it *for us*: "that we might gain our freedom from him, the concrete and plenary norm of all moral action,

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater* (1987), 2-3.

to accomplish God's will and to live up to our vocation to be free children of the Father."⁵⁵ The norm of the concrete existence of Christ "is both personal and universal, because in him the Father's love for the world is realized in a comprehensive and unsurpassable way."⁵⁶ We find here the foundation of Mary's role in ethics and the justification of her role in the social life, because she is not only the mother and disciple of Christ, the *universal concrete norm* of the Christian understanding of the moral life, she is also herself the *Realsymbol* of all Christian vocation.

6. The Transformative Cultural Model

Christianity practices transformation, and thus has adopted a transformative cultural model. This transformational model holds that Christianity must embody itself in appropriate cultural forms. "A faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted."⁵⁷ And as mentioned, the transformational model stipulates that the gospel message is above and beyond all cultures. It cannot be reduced to a specific culture, and it can only flower and bear fruit, if Christ remains the same, yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8). Christ is not only the *analogia entis* in person, but he is also the Christian cultural analogy; he is the truly concrete universal. The question about the role of Mary in a transformative cultural model brings us back to the original concern about Mary's pro-active mission in the new evangelization. It is precisely in a transformative cultural context that Mary's presence, maternal mediation, and exemplary activity will have the impact to produce transformation.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Nine Theses in Christian Ethics," in *International Theological Commission, Texts and Documents*, vol. 1 (1969-1985), ed. M. Sharkey (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 108.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁷ Pope John Paul II, "Faith and Culture Elevate Work: Address to Participants in the First National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement of Cultural Commitment (January 16, 1982)," *The Pope Speaks* 27 (1982): 157.

⁵⁸ A more comprehensive version of this anthropological profile of the *imago Dei* was published for the first time in J. Roten, "From Gatherer to Sender: Plaidoyer for a New Marian Dynamism," *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 64, no. 3 (July-Sept., 2014): 207-210.

C. "Nemo bene Christianus, qui non idem Marianus"

In a short article in *Marianum*,⁵⁹ the unforgettable Ismael Bengoechea, O.C.D., comments upon the expression of Paul VI that "se vogliamo essere cristiani, dobbiamo essere mariani," words pronounced on April 24, 1970, in the Sanctuary of Nostra Signora di Bonaria in Cagliari.⁶⁰ The purpose of the article is to retrace the expression to its origin. He determines that the expression was first used by the Norbertine Augustine Uvichmans of Antwerp in his anthology *Sabbatismus Marianus* (1628). The text reads as follows: "Neque enim habebit Deum Patrem, qui te non elegerit in Matrem, quia nemo bene Christianus, qui non idem Marianus."⁶¹

Part of the success of evangelization lies in our ability and docility to be transformed in the *ens marianum* or the *altera Maria*. Adopting for our personal life Mary's image and likeness would seem to be the safest and most dynamic way toward a more pro-active presence of Mary in our world. What we know of Mary, in order to make her better known, loved, and served, can be briefly summarized as follows.

The first and foremost trait of Mary's spiritual profile is trinitarian. The Spirit of Mary, her whole being, is initially and progressively fashioned by the triune love of God. Her spirituality has a trinitarian configuration which manifests itself in her faith (Father), hope (Son), and charity (Spirit). On a historical and existential level we recognize in Mary the typical christoform personality, a life lived in constant care and attention of her Son, as mother and disciple, as associate and spiritual mother of his followers. Thus, in Mary's existence, the initial yes to God's call grew into a permanent Fiat-structure of her personality. True religious commitment, because it was personal—the personal acceptance of God's project for her—had to be steeped in a sense of continuity and finality. The readiness to accept, the readiness to persevere, and the readiness to give are

⁵⁹ Ismael Bengoechea, "Pablo VI: 'Se vogliamo essere cristiani, dobbiamo: essere mariani.' Un precedente histórico de esta expresión," *Marianum* 55 (1993): 259–61.

⁶⁰ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 62 (1970): 299–301, here 300–301.

⁶¹ Pedro de Alba y Astorga, *Bibliotheca virginialis sive Mariae Mare Magnum*, vol. 3 (Madrid: Typographia Regia, 1648), t. 3, fol. 441.

the three constitutive elements of the spiritual person, as we discover it in Mary.

Looking at Mary's missionary charism, we notice that the laws of receiving and giving had a determining influence on what we might call her mission-orientation. The laws of receiving and giving have a determining influence on Mary's missionary charism, but also on ours on behalf of our participation in her mission. 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 ourselves become 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 these two fundamental relations, as can be seen in Mary's existence as the primary apostle of Christ.

Conclusion

All conclusions are partial. Mine will be to turn to the Marian icon using it as a synthesis of Mary's missionary charism. We find in the icon, the icon of mother and child, Mary's missionary appeal made of her very person, the culture it conveys, the action it encourages, and the exemplarity—or model of truth and love—it consecrates.

The icon of mother and child is probably the most powerful symbol, and one of the best syntheses, of Christianity. It brings together in a single and most attractive image the many facets of God's self-revelation to the world. It stresses in particular the unbreakable unity and complementarity between God and humankind. Symbol of the Incarnation, the icon of mother and child suggests and anticipates in subtle ways the semantics of Redemption. In Redemption, God gives himself away. He manifests himself as a child; he identifies with the little ones to give them new stature and heightened self-understanding, which is visually represented in the adult figure of the mother.

Thus, the figure of mother and child is not only an icon of revelation past, but also presents us with a whole spiritual doctrine, teaching us how Christ is growing in us so we might be able to grow in him. Above all, the image of mother and child is a living testament of love. It speaks without ceasing of God's loving self-giving, and the loving reception this gift was given in Mary's heart and womb. Mother and child are a manifesto of love directed to the whole world at all times. A constant and living witness to the divine-human unity, the mother-child icon is the highly visible center and living source of the Communion of Saints. Finally, the mother-child representation is a beautiful memento of the ever-active presence of the Spirit in Mary's life.

Last but not least, and most important for our present concern, the mother-child representation has a universal missionary appeal. It is the symbol of love and life, able to cross all borders of human understanding; it unites humanity in some of its most fundamental values and concerns, not to forget sacramental sensitivity and eschatological orientation.