

Mary and the Vocation of Philosophers

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Abstract

Pope John Paul II, in *Fides et ratio* #108, states that there is a deep harmony between the vocation of true philosophy and the Blessed Virgin Mary. This intriguing claim, so different from the usual link of Mary with faith, is developed in this article. Drawing analogical implications from selected events in Mary's life, two questions will be asked: How do philosophers "philosophize in Mary?;" and how could this way of philosophizing help us today to renew the vocation to be a philosopher? The following authors are considered: Thomas Aquinas, Edith Stein, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, Bernard Lonergan, Josef Ratzinger, Mary Daly, Robert Sokolowski, Norris Clarke, Søren Kierkegaard, Karol Wojtyła, John Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Judy Chicago, and John Henry Newman.

Keywords

Mary; faith; reason; vocation; philosophers

Pope John Paul II said in *Fides et ratio* "that between the vocation of the Blessed Virgin and the vocation of true philosophy there is a deep harmony" (#108).¹ This is an intriguing reflection because philosophers are usually associated with human reason, while Mary is usually associated with theologians, revelation, and faith. The encyclical also says that "all men and women... are in some sense philosophers and have their own philosophical conceptions with which they direct their lives" (#31). Since many philosophers have written about personal encounters with Mary in ways directly related to their vocation, let us consider how their reflections might help us respond to the invitation to philosophize in Mary, *philosophari in Maria*.²

¹ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998), #108.

² John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, #108 note 132.

The Call

Vocation is described in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a call by God through Jesus Christ to everyone to enter the Kingdom of heaven and to the perfection of sanctity.³ In the primary sense, vocation only concerns our final end, or union with God and the communion of saints. In a secondary sense, vocation concerns our state in life as consecrated religious, married lay, or ordained priest. Being a philosopher is a vocation in a tertiary sense, because it is only part of the means we use to reach our final end.

In Saint Paul's letter to the *Romans* 8:26–30 we read:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. . . . And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.⁴

Thomas Aquinas, in reflecting on this sequence of 'foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified' distinguished God's predestination for our end of union with Him from providence which concerns means proportionate to our end.⁵ The Creator providentially endows many philosophers with gifts of intelligence and will, strong passions of desire and love for truth, and hopefully, with a good education, and being placed in situations where persons and texts could be encountered to open the world of philosophy. Then a person may experience, as Heidegger so poignantly stated, "The question 'What calls on us to think?' [which] strikes us directly, like a lightning bolt."⁶

St. Edith Stein/Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, OCD, suggests that the Christian experiences a deep and, hopefully, more integrated call:

Everything that penetrates into the interiority of the soul is an appeal of a call to the *person*, an appeal to the person's *intellect*, i.e., to that power which "understands" what is happening; an appeal also to *reflection*, i.e., to that power which searches for the *meaning* of that which approaches the soul; and an appeal to *freedom*, since even the

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Image, 1995), #1, 3, 543, and 825.

⁴ *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1966). This text is used for quotations from Scripture unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981), 5 vols, Pt. I, Q. 23, art. 1. Note that the Latin *Theologiae* has been rendered in the published English translation as *Theologica*.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 116.

intellectual search for meaning is already free activity. However, beyond this the soul is required to behave and act in accordance with the meaning for which it searches.⁷

If we are Baptized, then we are formed beyond human nature into the super-nature of Divine life; we are called into a rectitude of order by the justification which remits original sin.⁸ Adrienne von Speyer adds that for a Christian: “A call is always from the Lord. . . . He continues to work redemption by calling persons to help Him in this task. That they should help, however, is not what first becomes apparent from the call.”⁹

Considering this same challenge, Edith Stein directly refers to Maritain’s observation that “grace purifies and strengthens the human intellect, making it less vulnerable to error (*though by no means safe from erring*) than it was in its fallen state.”¹⁰ While created grace is often placed in the philosopher’s soul *accidentally* for the good of another, i.e., student or reader, uncreated grace is in the *essence* of the philosopher’s soul through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, prompting the person to become holy, i.e. glorified.

In the *Summa Theologiae* St. Thomas observed that God gives to each person the grace needed to fulfill their vocation. Furthermore, he argued that Jesus Christ had “such a fullness of grace that it overflowed from Him into all. . . . Whereas the Blessed Virgin Mary received such a fullness of grace that she was nearest of all to the Author of grace.” Thomas did not foresee Mary or contemporary women philosophers teaching others in the world: “[t]here is no doubt that the Blessed Virgin received in a high degree. . . . the gift of wisdom. . . . but she . . . had not the use of wisdom as to teaching, since this befitted not the female sex. . . .”¹¹ Yet, Thomas argued that Mary in her perfection in glory dispenses grace to all in union with her Son. Our analysis of the harmony between Mary and the vocation of true philosophy will consider how the encounter of philosophers with the glorified Mary, after her Assumption into heaven, has affected their self-understanding.

⁷ Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being* (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 2002), 438–39.

⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, “[J]ustification, ‘implies a certain rectitude of order in the interior disposition of a man, in so far as what is highest in man is subject to God, and the inferior powers of the soul are subject to the superior, i.e., to reason; and this disposition the Philosopher [i.e., Aristotle] calls *justice metaphorically speaking* (*Ethic. v. 11*).’”, Pt. 1–11. Q. 113, art. 1.

⁹ Adrienne von Speyr, *They Followed His Call: Vocation and Asceticism* (New York: Alba House, 1978), 3.

¹⁰ Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, 21. My emphasis.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 27, art. 5, repl. obj. 3.

Mary as the “Table at which Faith Sits in Thought”

The poetic image in *Fides et ratio* #108, from the Byzantine tradition of “Mary as the table at which faith sits in thought” will provide a continuity to our analysis. John Paul II traces this image of table back to the Greek word *Trápeza* whose primary meaning is: altar.¹² He refers to Pseudo-Epiphanius’ *Homily in Praise of Holy Mary, Mother of God*, where the literal translation of the text describes Mary as “the intellectual table of faith which furnished the bread of life to the world.”¹³ The Latin word *mensa*, used in the official text of *Fides et ratio* similarly includes the meaning of altar.¹⁴

How can we think of Mary as the altar at which Catholic philosophers, who work through concepts, judgments, and arguments, sit in thought and as the intellectual table of faith which furnished the bread of life to the world? Jacques Maritain may have provided us a way in his essay, “The Preconscious Life of the Intellect:”

Far beneath the sunlit surface thronged with explicit concepts and judgments, words and expressed resolutions or movements of the will, are the sources of knowledge and creativity, of love and supra-sensuous desires, hidden in the primordial translucent night of the intimate vitality of the soul. Thus it is that we must recognize the existence of [a] . . . preconscious which pertains to the spiritual powers of the human soul and to the inner abyss of personal freedom, and of the personal thirst and striving for knowing and seeing, grasping and expressing. . .¹⁵

Following Maritain’s analysis can we hypothesize that Mary pre-exists in God as a type of philosopher and that there is a conaturality between Mary and a Christian philosopher? Also, if the type of table pre-exists in God as an altar, is there a conaturality between the

¹² John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* footnote 132 to #108. According to the *Greek Patristic Dictionary*, [PGL, 1399.] *trápeza* also includes: table of Last Supper, table of shewbread, manger at Bethlehem, the vessels laid upon the altar, Christ’s tomb, Throne of God, place of Christ’s death, burial, Resurrection, and Ascension, and womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

¹³ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, #108, note 132 referring to S.P.N. Epiphanius, *Opera, Patrologiae Graecae, Homilia V in Laudes Sanctae Mariae Deiparae*, vol. 43, 486–502, here 493. The phrase “*he noerâ tês písteos trápeza*” is translated by Marica Frank, PhD. The phrase comes from the following broader context: “You are the Mother of God who alone gave birth to the only-begotten Son of the one God. You did not bear God for the present time but God who is before you and before all, incarnate from you. The immaculate sheep who bore Christ the lamb. The heifer unyoked who bore a calf. The intellectual table of faith which furnished the bread of life to the world.”

¹⁴ *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* (L and S 1133): “A table for any purpose, as a dining-table; a market-stand for meat, vegetables, etc; a money-dealer’s table or counter, a sacrificial table, etc.” The Latin for this passage in *Fides et ratio* #108 is: “. . . *fidei mensa intellectualis* appellabatur. Ipsam congruentem verae philosophiae effigiem respiciebant sibi que erant conscii se debere *cum Maria philosophari*.”

¹⁵ Jacques Maritain, “The Preconscious Life of the Intellect,” in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), 69.

tables at which we philosophers sit in thought and an altar of the Holy Eucharist?

Can we discover new ways to philosophize in Mary? Since John Paul II re-instituted the memorial of the Holy Name of Mary perhaps even just saying the name ‘Mary’ can elevate our minds and hearts.¹⁶ It may also help us to find some concrete reminders of Mary as the ‘table’ at which our faith sits in thought. For some of us perhaps our desk, lectern, or seminar-table may call to mind this mystery. For others, more distant analogies with a table-of-contents, chair of a department, or even an academic chair could serve as a reminder. All of us, however, when we attend to the Holy altar during Mass or other times of prayer, can be reminded of the harmony of the vocation to true philosophy with Mary as the ‘intellectual table of faith which furnished the bread of life to the world.’ To make these reminders more concrete, we will now turn to some selected aspects of Mary’s vocation, whose meaning philosophers have pondered and articulated.

The Annunciation

At the Annunciation Mary engaged in an interpersonal dialogue with the Archangel Gabriel, emissary of the Eternal Father, while sitting at the table of her own embodied being.¹⁷ She revealed her gift of intellect by seeking insight, as Bernard Lonergan would say, by questioning: ‘How can this be?’¹⁸ David Meconi, S.J. observes that: “Mary exemplifies philosophy’s initial task to receive reality and not manipulate it. Unlike some Baconian mastery or Cartesian orchestration of the world, Mary symbolizes the awe of standing before a reality wholly independent of the human mind.”¹⁹

In addition to the exercise of her intellect, Mary exercised her gift of free will. Soren Kierkegaard reflected on this dynamic of Mary’s vocation in his *Journal*: “Theme: that the angel made the right choice—for Mary made the right choice. . . She could, then—yes, as Sarah did—she could have smiled [or] dismissed it. Or she could have said. . . I am not up to it.” Mary’s vocation exemplifies Kierkegaard’s

¹⁶ To be celebrated on September 12, 2005. “Saint Bernard declared that the name of Mercy, Mother of God, should ever be on our lips and in our hearts. The feast of the Holy Name of Mary was first instituted in Spain in 1513. See, *Magnificat*, (September 2005), 148.

¹⁷ See John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women)* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1988), #5. See also *Redemptoris Mater (Mother of the Redeemer)* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1987), #13.

¹⁸ Bernard Lonergan, “The Question,” in *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957/1992), 33–34.

¹⁹ David Vincent Meconi, S.J., “*Philosophari in Maria*” in David Ruel Foster and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et ratio* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 69–90, here 71.

argument that willing the good end of a vocation demands willing the good means and being willing to suffer all for the Good. For the rest of us, willing the good must involve working to overcome all double-mindedness, self-deception, and evasion.²⁰

In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II described Mary's actions in the Annunciation: "through her response of faith Mary exercises her free will and thus fully shares with her personal and feminine 'I' in the event of the Incarnation [and] . . . by responding with her "fiat" Mary conceived a man who was the Son of God, of one substance with the Father. Therefore, she is *truly the Mother of God, because motherhood concerns the whole person*, not just the body, nor even just the human 'nature.'"²¹ This personalist description of Mary's vocation is very important because some feminists have incorrectly suggested (in a post-Cartesian age) that Mary's identity was primarily limited to her body. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger also rejected a Cartesian dualism in understanding the integrated nature of Mary's response at the Annunciation:

In her believing response to the call of God, Mary appears as the prototype of a creation which is likewise called to respond; she manifests the freedom of the creature, a freedom which is not dissolved, but comes to its fulfillment, in love. But it is precisely as a woman that she exemplifies saved and liberated mankind. . . . The 'biological' is inseparable from the human, just as the human is inseparable from the 'theological.'²²

John Paul II furthermore suggested in *Redemptoris Mater* that Simeon's words at the Presentation were "a second Annunciation to Mary," namely that Jesus "and his Mother with him, will experience [being] . . . a sign that is spoken against. . . in misunderstanding and sorrow."²³ The Annunciation accentuates the great dignity of human free will, and the great love of the Eternal Father who waited for the free decision of his beloved daughter of Zion. The late Holy Father has emphasized that, "All of God's action in human history at all times respects the free will of the human 'I.' And such was the case with the Annunciation at Nazareth."²⁴

Some philosophers have misunderstood or intentionally distorted the Annunciation dialogue. Consider, for example, a vulgar example of Mary Daly, who describes Mary at the Annunciation as undergoing

²⁰ Soren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will one Thing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1948), especially 197ff and 148 ff.

²¹ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, #4.

²² Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Mariology and Marian Spirituality," in *The Church and Women: A Compendium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988): 67–79, here 76.

²³ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, #16.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, #4.

an “unspeakable degradation.”²⁵ Daly concludes falsely: “. . . as a consequence of her initial rape (‘grace’) [of the Immaculate Conception] Mary has been totaled, made totally unable to resist divine aggression/lust/rape. At “The Annunciation,” then, the already raped Mary ‘consents’ to further rape.”²⁶ The false nature of Daly’s argument seems to fit a pattern of conflict between the forces of evil and woman’s identity as summarized in *Mulieris Dignitatem*: “. . . before the woman who is about to give birth’ (cf. Rev. 12:4), there stands ‘the great dragon. . . that ancient serpent’ (Rev. 12.9), already known from the Proto-evangelium: The Evil One, the ‘father of lies’ and of sin (cf.. Jn 8:44). The ‘ancient serpent’ wishes to devour ‘the child.’”²⁷

John Paul II appeals in *Fides et ratio* to Christian philosophers to accept the “grave duty” to “diagnose” the erroneous opinions of philosophers.”²⁸ How we may begin through our vocation to respond to this appeal is captured by Adrienne van Speyr’s words: “When God’s call really sounds, however, all previous judgments and valuations are bracketed, the sober ones as well as the fantastic. The call is the absolute fact, the unvitiated objectivity. It is the voice of God that addresses itself to a particular person. Through this call the person, the addressee, becomes who he is, and he enters the only light that truly illumines him.”²⁹

Another aspect of the Annunciation mystery may help us here. Thomas Aquinas says: “It was reasonable that it should be announced to the Blessed Virgin that she was to conceive Christ. . . that she should be informed in mind concerning Him, before conceiving Him in the flesh. Thus, Augustine says (*De Sancta Virgin.* iii): *Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ, than in conceiving the flesh of Christ. . .*”³⁰ Ponder how analogously a priest at the liturgy of the Eucharist is the vehicle who expresses himself through specific words and gestures over the altar, its sacred vessels, and their contents during the consecration, and then the Son of God, one in substance with the Father, becomes flesh in the Eucharistic species.

Msgr. Robert Sokolowski observes that: “The Mass involves both words and actions. The liturgy of the word, in the reading of Scripture, calls to mind the past actions of God, while the liturgy of the Eucharist makes the past action of God present again: what has been

²⁵ Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 74. See also the discussion of ‘The Immaculate Perception,’ in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 122–123.

²⁶ Daly, *Pure Lust*, 104.

²⁷ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, #30.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, #54.

²⁹ Speyer, *They Followed His Call*, 11.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 30, art. 1.

reported in words can now be registered in its sacramental presence.”³¹ Catholic philosophers, who are priests in communion with lay and consecrated philosophers at the altar of the Eucharistic sacrifice, may find inspiration in reflecting on how Mary serves here as the altar-table at which faith thinks. Here, with Epiphanius we can say: “Mary, you are the Mother of God, . . . the intellectual table of faith which furnishes the bread of life to the world!”³²

The Visitation

The communal dimension of Mary’s vocation is emphasized by Norris Clarke: “. . .to develop properly, philosophy needs a *community of persons*, and especially the experience of *trust between persons*, since so much of what we know and take as data for understanding must come from trust in what others tell us. This is especially true with respect to the philosophical understanding of the person and interpersonal relations. . . .”³³ By analogy we can ponder that in the Visitation Mary “went in haste” to be with Elizabeth, to share her vocation with a companion. The *communio* of the vocation to be a Catholic philosopher is not necessarily shared in other traditions. For example, Kierkegaard emphasized the isolation of Mary as like that of Abraham: “To be sure, Mary bore the child wondrously, but she nevertheless did it ‘after the manner of women,’ and such a time is one of anxiety, distress, and paradox. . . . The angel went only to Mary, and no one could understand her.”³⁴ Yet, Elizabeth was able to be with Mary in a communion of persons, even without perhaps understanding completely the mystery of her encounter with God, and Joseph entered into communion with Mary after he came to realize his own call.

Have we welcomed the shepherds [analogically guided by faith] and the wise men [analogically guided by observation of the senses and reason] as Mary and Joseph welcomed them to adore Jesus Christ, who is Truth, as he lay in a manger-table? Consider also Edith Stein’s meditation on the mystery of the Epiphany: “Again we kneel with the three kings at the manger. The heartbeat of the Divine Child has guided the star that led us here. Its light, the reflection of the eternal light, is variously distributed around the heads of the saints whom the church shows us as the court of the new-born King

³¹ Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 212.

³² See note 12 above.

³³ W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “The Complementarity of Faith and Philosophy, *Communio* 26 (1999): 562–63.

³⁴ Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/ Repetition* (Princeton: University Press, 1983), 65.

of Kings. They allow something of the mystery of our vocation to flash before us. . . . Mary and Joseph are. . . . completely imbued with his heavenly light.”³⁵ How do we allow the mystery of our vocation to flash before us? Whose radiant light do we seek to communicate in our speaking and writing? With the faith and writings of which shepherds are we in complement collaboration to give glory to the One who is Truth?

In *Fides et ratio*, the Byzantine phrase for table, or *trápeza*, in the broad sense connotes a communal reality that draws people together through what is laid out on it and made available for others. True philosophy like a good *trápeza*, or *mensa*, is foundational to the individual strength and well being of those persons sitting around it and gathered together by it and for the health of the community as a whole. True philosophy is thus both analogous with ordinary bread as the staff of life and with the bread of life, or Jesus Christ as Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

The Wedding Feast of Cana

Consider how Mary analogously represents both the banquet table and providing for the things served at the table for the Wedding Feast of Cana. St. Edith Stein describes her this way: “Mary at the wedding of Cana in her quiet, observing look surveys everything and discovers what is lacking. Before anything is noticed, even before embarrassment sets in, she has procured the remedy. She finds ways and means, she gives necessary directives, doing all quietly. She draws no attention to herself. Let her be the prototype of woman in professional life.”³⁶ For Edith Stein, Mary is acting here according to what she calls the *ethos* of woman, which is an “inner form [and] constant spiritual attitude” towards other persons which manifests itself in external action.³⁷ Stein also fills out some specific content of woman’s *ethos*: i.e., “Woman naturally seeks to embrace that which is living, personal, and whole.”³⁸

Pope John Paul II seemed to follow much of Edith Stein’s analysis of women’s *ethos* when he came to formulate his own philosophy of women’s genius. We know that Roman Ingarden, a close colleague of Stein’s in graduate studies became Karol Wojtyla’s professor at Cracow. Furthermore, in *Rise, Let us Be on Our Way* (1997), Pope John

³⁵ Edith Stein, *The Hidden Life: Essays, Meditations, Spiritual Texts* (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1992), 113. I am making an analogous application with Stein’s reflections on her religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

³⁶ Edith Stein, “Ethos of Women’s Professions,” in *Essays on Woman* (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1987), 49.

³⁷ Stein, “Ethos,” 41.

³⁸ Stein, “Ethos,” 43.

Paul II told us directly: “I was interested in her [Edith Stein’s] philosophy. I read her writings.”³⁹ In *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988) John Paul II referred to “that ‘genius’ which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance. . . .”⁴⁰ Then in *Letter to Women* (1995) he linked women’s genius to the vocation of Mary: “The Church sees in Mary the highest expression of the “feminine genius” and she finds in her a source of constant inspiration. . . . Through obedience to the Word of God she accepted her lofty yet not easy vocation as wife and mother in the family of Nazareth. Putting herself at God’s service, she also put herself at the service of others: a service of love.”⁴¹

The Last Supper

In *Mulieris Dignitatem* John Paul II examined how during the Last Supper, Jesus Christ, the Divine self-gift of Love, “reveals the spousal love of God. Christ is the Bridegroom because ‘he has given himself’: his body has been ‘given,’ his blood has been ‘poured out’ (cf. Lk 22:19–20). . . . The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride. The Eucharist makes present and realizes anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ. . . .”⁴²

The Eucharist can only be understood through faith. *Fides et ratio* #7 summarizes the movement: “This initiative is utterly gratuitous moving from God to men and women in order to bring them to salvation.”⁴³ Furthermore, in #15, “the truth made known to us by revelation is neither the product nor the consummation of an argument devised by human reason. It appears instead as something gratuitous, which itself stirs thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love.”⁴⁴

Since we are considering how a vocation to true philosophy harmonizes with Mary’s vocation, and since Mary expresses the fullness of

³⁹ John Paul II, *Rise, Let us Be On Our Way* (New York: Time Warner Books, 2004), 90.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, #30.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Letter to Women* in *The Genius of Women* (Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997), #10.

⁴² John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, # 26.

⁴³ For a more detailed consideration the complementarity of faith/ reason, philosophy/ theology, and philosophers/ theologians see Prudence Allen, R.S.M., “Person and Complementarity in *Fides et ratio*,” in David Foster and Joseph Koterski, S.J., eds., *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et ratio* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 36–68.

⁴⁴ The passage continues: . . . The ultimate purpose of personal existence, then, is the theme of philosophy and theology alike. For all their difference of method and content, both disciplines point to that ‘path of life’ (Ps 16:11) which, as faith tells us, leads in the end to the full and lasting joy of the contemplation of the Triune God.”

a woman's genius, let us identify three main components of her identity and dignity: 1) she was created with intellect and will as a human being with the highest capacities for thought and free choice, 2) she acted with loving concern and self-gift of service towards those other persons entrusted to her, and 3) she was called into an eternal union of love with the Transcendent God, who sent His Beloved Son into the world through her free cooperation with the Divine initiative. Many secular philosophers, from Nietzsche to Mary Daly, deny the existence of a transcendent God. In contrast, Msgr. Robert Sokolowski describes how the altar of the Eucharist draws us into the mystery of the truly transcendent identity of God: "Only the God who is so independent of the world as the biblical God is revealed to be could become incarnate and sacramentally present in the Eucharist. . . The Eucharist is a constant reminder of the transcendence of God."⁴⁵

The Way of the Cross

In a letter, St. Francis of Assisi links the Cross to the pre-imminent type of table: "The father willed that his blessed and glorious Son, whom he gave to us and who was born for us, should through his own blood offer himself as a sacrificial victim on the *altar of the cross*. This was to be done . . . for our sins."⁴⁶ Pondering how the Cross is analogous to Mary's intellectual table of faith which furnished the bread of life to the world, let us consider three categories of philosophers' sins which could be examined in relation to Jesus' falls. In so doing, we may discover concretely the truth of Pope John Paul II's observation in *Fides et ratio* how "that part [of what persons produce] that contains a special share of his [or her] genius and initiative—can radically turn against himself [or herself]."⁴⁷

Jesus *falls under the weight of the cross-bar the first time* when **human identity is reduced from its great dignity** given to it by being created in the image of God with intellect and will and by Jesus Christ assuming it in the Incarnation. An example of such a reduction of human identity can be found in Jean Paul Sartre's caricature of woman's identity near the conclusion of *Being and Nothingness*: "The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which 'gapes open.' It is an appeal to being as all holes are. . . ; woman senses her condition as an appeal precisely because she is 'in the form of a

⁴⁵ Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence*, 108.

⁴⁶ St. Francis of Assisi, *Opuscula*; (edit. Zuaracchi 1949), 87–94. *The Liturgy of the Hours* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), vol iv, October 4, Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi, Second Reading.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, #47.

hole.”⁴⁸ Simone de Beauvoir complained in *The Second Sex* that the male human being condemned woman to her biological nature, and added that: “Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*.”⁴⁹ Yet she also reduced the dignity of woman’s identity herself when she argued that: “Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature.”⁵⁰ Beauvoir stated further that women gave up their own transcendence by allowing themselves to be thus reduced.

In a well-known artistic exhibit called *The Dinner Party*, Judy Chicago ended up reducing woman’s identity in a similar way.⁵¹ In her discursive description of this extensive work Chicago described how she changed the table of the Last Supper into the table of a witches’ coven, and depicted the works of 39 women geniuses not by their great achievements or acts of personal transcendence, but rather by plates representing their vaginas, and tapestries representing what happened to them (such as dying in childbirth).⁵² What Chicago achieved is what women have for years objected to, namely, being turned into an object, and specifically into a sex object by the other. In the *Dinner Party*, women have ironically done this to themselves.⁵³

Jesus falls under the weight of the cross-bar the second time, when the bond of love between two human beings is reduced to utilitarian or hedonistic purposes. Consider the utilitarian relation between

⁴⁸ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 613–14. I am grateful to Terry Wright, PhD for his suggestion that I emphasize the contrast between Sartre with Beauvoir and Jacques with Raïssa Maritain.

⁴⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 267.

⁵⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xviii.

⁵¹ Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), 11. Judy Chicago’s thirty-nine guests at the dinner party table included the philosophers: Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Christine de Pizan (1363–1431), Anna van Schurmann (1607–1678), and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797). The floor in the middle of the three triangular sides of the table lists the names of nine-hundred and ninety-nine guests, including the philosophers: Lucrezia Marinelli (1571–1653), Maria le Jars de Gournay (1565–1645), Margaret Cavendish (1624–1674), Mary Astell (1666/68–1731), Emilie du Chatelet (1706–1749), Simone Weil (1909–1943), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986).

⁵² Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 67.

⁵³ One could add as another example in transition to the second fall, Eve Ensler’s recent vulgar drama “Vagina Monologues” which according to Sister Renée Mirkes, OSF, PhD, “A Tale of Failed Feminism,” *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* (Summer 2005): 7–9, “celebrates the basest of human instincts.” 7. The philosophers Robert J. Spitzer, S.J. and Brian J. Shanley, O.P, as well as Bishop John M. D’Arcy, Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend have also recently written significant critiques of the VM Dialogues to Faculty at Gonzaga University, Providence College, and the President of Notre Dame respectively.

Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. On the one hand, they claimed that theirs was a necessary bond of love, while, on the other hand, for years they both entered into multiple sexual relations with others persons of both sexes. Their acts undermined the possibility of their full gift of self to one another; they emptied mutual trust, broke fidelity, and transcendently annulled the very possibility of true love.⁵⁴ The emptiness of love and of friendship is evident Beauvoir's question near the end of Sartre's life: "Many of your friendships have ended in estrangement. . . Why were things like that?" and Sartre's answer that "Breaking off doesn't affect me in the least. A thing is dead—that's all. . ." ⁵⁵

Beauvoir and Sartre both were baptized in the Catholic Church, and they both later publically rejected this gift of faith.⁵⁶ Subsequently, they approved of killing innocent persons—Beauvoir by abortion and Sartre by saying that he would have carried suitcases with bombs for the Algerian Front into a café.⁵⁷ During the final days of their lives together Beauvoir describes how, with their minds deadened by drugs and alcohol,⁵⁸ they avoided speaking together about the true situation of Sartre's pending death. After Sartre died, Beauvoir concluded: "His death does separate us. My death will not bring us together again. That is how things are."⁵⁹

Jesus falls under the weight of the cross-bar the third time when the profound love between the transcendent God and His creature is reduced or simply rejected. Of course many philosophers such as Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Sartre, Foucault have contributed to the crushing weight of this fall. A more recent example, tied up with woman's identity, is Mary Daly, who deconstructs what she calls: "the reified images often lurking behind such terms as 'Creator, [and]', 'Lord,' . . ."⁶⁰ Next, implying a false dichotomy or radical conflict between God's transcendence and immanence, Daly follows

⁵⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1986), 284–332.

⁵⁵ Beauvoir, *Adieux*, 275.

⁵⁶ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1969), "I have just related the story of a missed vocation: I needed God, He was given to me, I received Him without realizing that I was seeking Him. Failing to take root in my heart, He vegetated in me for a while, then He died.", 64–65; See also, Beauvoir, *Adieux*, 432–445.

⁵⁷ In the 1970's Beauvoir signed on to the Manifesto of 343, admitting (it is now thought falsely) to an illegal abortion, in a campaign for free contraception and greater access to abortion. See Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: a biography* (New York: Summit Books, 1990) and Philip Thody, *Jean-Paul Sartre: a Literary and Political Study* (New York, Macmillan 1961).

⁵⁸ Beauvoir, *Adieux*, 105 and 118.

⁵⁹ Beauvoir, *Adieux*, 127.

⁶⁰ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 34.

“Whitehead’s God [who] is not a creator God, that is, not merely *before* all creation but *with* creation.”⁶¹

In *Fides et ratio* John Paul II offers an observation that would be applicable to Daly’s thought: “Of itself, philosophy is . . . with the assistance of faith . . . capable of accepting the ‘foolishness’ of the cross as the authentic critique of those who delude themselves that they possess the truth, when in fact they run it aground on the shoals of a system of their own devising.”⁶² Mary Daly draws out the implications of the system of her own devising when she states her goals: “a male savior . . . is precisely what is impossible. A patriarchal divinity or his son is exactly *not* in a position to save us from the horrors of a patriarchal world. . . In its depth, because it contains a dynamic that drives beyond Christolatry, the women’s movement *does* point to, seek, and constitute the primordial, always present, and future Antichrist.”⁶³ To conclude her distorted logic, Daly follows a Nietzschean line of thought, that the Antichrist is not evil but simply either beyond good and evil, or, transvalued as the good “that can bring us beyond Christolatry into a fuller stage of conscious participation in the *living* God.”⁶⁴

Raïssa Maritain reflected back on an interior despair that had pierced her own heart in 1901, when as young students at the Sorbonne she and Jacques confronted the face of evil in the Jardin des Plantes: “This metaphysical anguish, going down to the very roots of the desire for life, is capable of becoming a total despair and of ending in suicide. I believe that during these last dark years, in Austria, in Germany, in Italy, in France, thousands of suicides have been due to this despair, even more than to the overburdening of other sufferings of body and soul.”⁶⁵ Her own despair was so acute that she and Jacques made the decision to commit suicide themselves “if it were impossible to live according to the truth.”⁶⁶

The painful three falls of Our Lord under the weight of sins against women’s human dignity, against human love, and against the love between God and human persons may bring to mind some images from

⁶¹ Daly, *Beyond God*, 88. She cites Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 519–33. For others who have followed Whitehead down this same path see Sheila Greeve Davaney, ed., *Feminism and Process Thought* (New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), and Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Mistress of Heaven: The Meaning of Mariology,” in *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 36–62; and *Conscience: The News Journal of Catholic Opinion*, sponsored by *Catholics For Free Choice*, for which Ruether is the Editorial Advisor.

⁶² John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, #23.

⁶³ Daly, *Beyond God*, 96. Her emphasis.

⁶⁴ Daly, *Beyond God*, 96. Her emphasis.

⁶⁵ Raïssa Maritain, *We have Been Friends Together and Adventures in Grace* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1961), 65.

⁶⁶ Raïssa Maritain, *We have Been Friends Together*, 68.

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. Gibson shared his thinking about certain aspects of the film with John Bartunek, L.C., who was present during much of the filming.⁶⁷ Many images of the film were taken from the personal meditations of Catherine Emmerich. Raïssa Maritain described how the "*Revelations of Anna Catherine Emmerich, ... gave us a picture of Catholicism that was crowded and vivid, moving and yet familiar. ... In our ignorance we had the greatest need for the help of images...*"⁶⁸ Some of these images well-up from the depths of the soul in that arena that Jacques Maritain previously described in his essay on "The Preconscious Life of the Intellect."

In one particular image from Gibson's film, walking in the crowds beside her Son along the Way of the Cross, Mary's glance met for a time the eyes of the figure of Satan or the Devil. According to Fr. Bartunek and Gibson, "The only person in the entire film who sees that evil presence is Mary."⁶⁹ The image of this encounter of Mary with the presence of evil, and the claim that there is the deepest harmony between the vocation of Mary and the vocation of a philosopher, may help to understand the passage in which Pope John Paul described Pope Leo XIII's mandate to the philosopher's vocation to defend the truth:

Catholic theologians and philosophers, whose grave duty it is to defend natural and supernatural truth and instill it in human hearts, cannot afford to ignore these more or less erroneous opinions. Rather they must come to understand these theories well, not because diseases are properly treated only if rightly diagnosed and because even in these false theories some truth is found at times, but because in the end these theories provoke a more discriminating discussion and evaluation of philosophical and theological truths.⁷⁰

Turning again to the Way of the Cross, Jesus, after gathering strength from his inter-personal encounters of love with Mary and others, relentlessly moved towards His *Crucifixion*. As He was lifted up on the Cross, all the sins of philosophers were lifted with Him unto their consummation. Mary, in suffering union with her Son, *stood at the Foot of the Cross* until His mission was completed, and the sacramental life of the Church began to flow from the water and blood flowing from His pierced side. St. Edith Stein/Sister Benedicta reflected on the hidden mystery of Mary at the foot of the Cross: "She lives, she is wedded to the Lamb, but the hour of the solemn marriage supper will only arrive when the dragon has been

⁶⁷ John Bartunek, L.C., *Inside the Passion* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2005).

⁶⁸ Raïssa Maritain, *We have Been Friends Together*, 121.

⁶⁹ Bartunek, L.C., *Inside the Passion*, 114–115.

⁷⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, #54, citing, Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (1950), AAS 42, 563–564.

completely conquered and the last of the redeemed have fought their battle to the end.”⁷¹ When Jesus’ lifeless Body is taken down and given to Mary, Throne of Wisdom, her lap becomes another table which holds the mystery of death and life.⁷²

The Resurrection, Ascension, and Sending of the Holy Spirit

Recall the time in 1901, when despair drove Raïssa and Jacques Maritain to a form of suicide pact in the Jardin des Plantes. Within the year they began to have an experience of personal resurrection from the despair into which they had been plunged. The Maritains entered into dialogue with friends like Léon Bloy, read Bergson, Pascal, and Teresa of Avila, and visited Holy sites like the Cathedral of Chartres. These experiences of good people, religious philosophers, saints, and sacred beauty contributed to a beginning of resurrection from despair.

Raïssa also described the poignant moment in 1902 when she and Jacques were sitting together, and a gesture and glance brought the mutual realization of **an eternal source of their human and divine love**: “The feeling flowed through me that always—for my happiness and my salvation... that always my life would be bound up with Jacques. It was one of those tender and peaceful feelings which are like a gift flowing from a region higher than ourselves, illuminating the future and deepening the present. From that moment our understanding was perfect and unchangeable.”⁷³ The discovery of profound, eternal human love, like a grace of truth flowing from above also contributed to the overcoming of temptations towards a meaningless life and death. Raïssa and Jacques decided to become engaged; and they were married in 1904. Through the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christians are called into a true *communio* which transforms their interpersonal relationships. Responding to this call, in 1906, Jacques, Raïssa, and Vera, her sister were Baptized and received their first communion.

Years after their conversion to Catholicism, Raïssa and Jacques Maritain described in their *Journals* and *Notebooks* how they worked together to help one another become Christian philosophers. In retrospect Jacques wrote: “I want justice to be done to Raïssa. If there

⁷¹ Stein, *The Hidden Life*, 98–99. See also, 107.

⁷² Rev. John Bartunek, *Inside the Passion*, quoting Elizabeth Lev describes how in Gibson’s *Passion of the Christ*: “Mary [holds] one hand cradling his [Jesus’] body and the other hand open toward the viewer... Mary looks straight out at us... provoking a full and conscious acknowledgment of whom this suffering has been for.” 164.

⁷³ Raïssa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together*, 85.

is anything good in my philosophical work, and in my books, this has its deep source and light in her contemplative prayer and in the oblation of herself she made to God.”⁷⁴ A little later in the same text, he gives a more detailed example of how Raïssa fostered his personal integrity:

...[S]he succeeded by a hard effort of will (and because the collaboration I had always asked of her was, for her, a sacred duty) in revising in manuscript everything I have written and published, both in French and English... Physically shattered by [her sister] Vera’s death, she wept, less over her bereavement, than over certain passages in my first draft [of *On Moral Philosophy*] where I had allowed subjectivity with its bitternesses and its anger to intrude. This she rightly judged unworthy of philosophy, and her mind, bless her, was not set at rest until philosophical objectivity had won the day...⁷⁵

This collaboration of Jacques and Raïssa is also evident when they wrote about love and friendship. In the *Fourth Notebook* for April 20, 1924 Raïssa entered: “The essence of love is in the communication of oneself, with fullness of joy and delight in the possession of the beloved. The essence of friendship is in desire for the good of one’s friend, strong enough to sacrifice for him.”⁷⁶ Jacques elaborated on her theory in *On Moral Philosophy*, in a section entitled “Love and Friendship: A Marginal note to the *Journal de Raïssa*.” “I will comment on and develop certain things which Raïssa expressed very clearly but very briefly... Raïssa had the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁷ During one of her long periods of illness and incapacity to speak, Jacques summarized: “I feel Raïssa is *consubstantialised* to truth, so that all words become a lie and a hurt... No other resource, I think, than Jesus himself, Jesus in his humanity, Jesus Saviour...whose human glance understands and heals.”⁷⁸ Jacques here is in the place of Mary, at the foot of the cross of Raïssa, who is suffering her agony with Jesus; both were living the mystery of the sequence ‘foreknown, predestined, and called to be conformed to the image of the Son.’

This dialogue of love dwelled in Jacques long after Raïssa’s death: “And right up to the last, she found help and comfort in the precious exchanges which delighted her, in conversation with her friends, and in those talks which she knew so well how to direct and animate

⁷⁴ Raïssa’s *Journal presented by Jacques Maritain* (Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, inc., 1974), 8.

⁷⁵ Raïssa’s *Journal*, 13.

⁷⁶ Raïssa’s *Journal*, 162. She adds: “God loves us with friendship by providing for all our necessities and by dying for us on the Cross.” 163.

⁷⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Untrammelled Approaches* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 165.

⁷⁸ Raïssa’s *Journal*, 251 (Loose Leaves from one of my notebooks, J.) His emphasis.

from her corner of the blue sofa in the living-room at Princeton—that place where I always see her and which I cannot think without a stab of pain.”⁷⁹ Raïssa, in the genius of her unique ethos as a Christian philosopher, was truly the table at which Jacques sat in thought.

John Paul II reminds us in his final publication, *Memory and Identity*, that “Mary’s memory is a source of singular importance for knowing Christ, an incomparable source. . . Mary was present at his Ascension into heaven, she was with the Apostles in the Upper Room awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit, and she was a witness to the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost.”⁸⁰ Adrienne von Speyr also draws out an important implication of Pentecost: “. . .the Son is in heaven while the Mother is still on earth: this distance has to be bridged. . . there exists for her an especially active relationship of exchange between heaven and earth.”⁸¹

How Mary was well-prepared for this mission by her Son, was beautifully described Cardinal Newman: “Mary for thirty continuous years saw and heard him, being all through that time face to face with him, and being able to ask him any question which she wished explained, and know that the answers she received were from the Eternal God, who neither deceives nor can be deceived.”⁸² Newman further amplifies Mary’s active engagement in her intellectual formation in relation to the Truth:

She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it; not enough to possess, she uses it; not enough to assent, she develops it; not enough to submit the reason, she reasons upon it. . . to investigate, and weigh, and define, as well as to profess the Gospel; to draw the line between truth and heresy; to anticipate or remedy the various aberrations of wrong reason; to combat pride and recklessness with their own arms; and thus to triumph over the sophist and the innovator.⁸³

The Assumption and Four Marian Apparitions

The dogma of the *Assumption*, proclaimed in 1950 and reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council in 1964 (*Lumen Gentium* #59) says that Mary, “on the completion of her earthly sojourn was taken up body

⁷⁹ Raïssa’s *Journal*, 13.

⁸⁰ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, 148–49.

⁸¹ Adrienne von Speyr, *Mary in the Redemption* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 108–109.

⁸² John Henry Newman, *The Mystical Rose: Thoughts on the Blessed Virgin from the Writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (Princeton: Scepter Publishers, 1996), 95.

⁸³ *Mary: The Virgin Mary in the Life and Writings of John Henry Newman*, Philip Boyce, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), 188–89.

and soul into heavenly glory.”⁸⁴ Recalling the sequence that began this study: foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified, Mary fulfilled the end of her vocation by being taken into the heart of the Holy Trinity, as daughter of the Eternal Father, Mother of the Beloved Son, and Spouse of the Holy Spirit.

Since Mary’s Assumption, body and soul, into heaven, she has from time to time visited the earth, as a pilgrim guide, to continue to teach us who are still on pilgrimage.⁸⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar explains why we should be attentive to the meaning of Marian apparitions:

Simply by the fact that she shows herself she already leads us into the mystery of what the Church is in her essential nature: a pure work of God’s grace. Mary is able, precisely in a spirit of complete humility, to point to herself because she is thereby pointing to nothing other than what God’s almighty grace is capable of and at the same time what we should strive after in order to become proper vessels for this grace, in order to play the real role of the Church (as the body and bride of Christ) correctly in her mission of salvation for the world.⁸⁶

Let us consider some brief reflections of a few philosophers who wrote about their profound personal encounter with truth revealed in a particular Marian apparition.

Mary’s appearance at *La Salette, France in 1846* deeply touched the Maritains. Raïssa wrote after she and Jacques had made a pilgrimage to the site of the apparition: “We climbed the steep road, said to be very dangerous; it was still difficult in those days. Surely its narrowness was like that of the gate of heaven. An immense rock wall to the left, an abyss to the right. . . We finally arrived. . . where the children had seen Our Lady sitting and weeping, then standing to speak to them, then drawn up into the heavens./ In this lofty retreat we prepared ourselves to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.”⁸⁷

Léon Bloy, a close friend of the Maritains, drew out some of the implications of this apparition: “Thus she is stricken, even in the very bosom of Beatitude. Reason is lost in this thought. A beatitude that ‘suffers’ and weeps—is it possible to conceive such a thing?”⁸⁸ The conjunction of beatitude and suffering in Mary at La Salette helped

⁸⁴ John Paul II, *Theotokos: Woman, Mother, Disciple: A Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God*, vol. 5 (Boston: Pauline Media, 2000), 203.

⁸⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1987), Part II ‘The Mother of God at the Center of the Pilgrim Church,’ #25–49.

⁸⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary for Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 44.

⁸⁷ Balthasar, *Mary for Today*, 150.

⁸⁸ Léon Bloy quoted by Raïssa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together*, 148.

the Maritains overcome their previous understanding of the limits of Aristotelian metaphysics and theology. Raïssa wrote:

This conjunction of suffering and Beatitude is allowed neither by theology nor by Aristotle. Beatitude means absolute fullness, and suffering is the cry of that which is wounded. But our God is a crucified God: the Beatitude of which He cannot be deprived did not prevent Him from fearing or mourning. . . or from passing through the throes of death on the Cross, or from feeling abandoned. . . /For a created being, to be capable of suffering is a real perfection; it is the lot of life and of the spirit, it is the greatness of man."⁸⁹

In *Guadalupe, Mexico in 1531 and Lourdes, France in 1858*, Mary teaches about pregnancy and conception. Our Lady of Guadalupe gave a real imprint of herself as a young pregnant woman; and at Lourdes, she tells her name: "I am the Immaculate Conception."⁹⁰ In our present context of a culture of death, Mary revealed in these apparitions that she was foreknown, predestined, and called at the moment of her conception. This dogma of faith should stir the minds of philosophers who write about when human life begins.

Balthasar wrote about the transforming effect of a smile of love in interpersonal encounters: "Now man exists only in dialogue with his neighbor. The infant is brought to consciousness of himself only by love, by the smile of his mother."⁹¹ Mary of Guadalupe's radiant smile, joined with the words that she would help Juan Diego overcome the Bishop's lack of belief in her appearance, filled him with joy. Even today the image on Juan Diego's *tilma* left during the apparition portrays Mary's smile. At Lourdes, St. Bernadette also concluded that Mary was happy with her actions because of "the Beautiful Lady's smile."⁹²

John Paul II said in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* that there "is a certain continuity among *La Salette, Lourdes, and Fátima*

⁸⁹ Léon Bloy quoted by Raïssa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together*, 48–49.

⁹⁰ For a history of the dogmatic bulls on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, see *Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church: Documents on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 2001).

⁹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: in Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 114. See also Johann Roten, S.M., "The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar," in David L. Schindler, ed. *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991): 65–86, especially 79–81.

⁹² In another well-known example, St. Thérèse of Lisieux recounts how, after being gravely ill, she became instantly cured while looking at a statue of Mary in her room: "The Blessed Virgin had seemed very beautiful to me, and I had seen her smile at me." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 99–100.

[1916–1917]—and, in the distant past, our Polish Jasna Góra.”⁹³ This continuity contains two dynamics: Mary had no fear after the Resurrection, and “Christ will conquer through her, because he wants the Church’s victories now and in the future to be linked to her.”⁹⁴

Symbolically depicting this, **the Crown of Our Lady of Fatima** now contains the bullet which wounded the late Holy Father on her feast day, May 13, 1981. In a chapter entitled “Someone must have guided that bullet,” in his final publication *Memory and Identity* (2005), Pope John Paul II pondered: “Acga knew how to shoot, and he certainly shot to kill. Yet it was as if someone was guiding and deflecting that bullet.”⁹⁵ Repeating a conversation with the late Holy Father, Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwicz shared his experience of how Mary’s presence helped support the fulfillment of the Pope’s vocation:

Five months after the attack, the Holy Father returned to Saint Peter’s Square to meet the faithful once again. He showed not a trace of fear, nor even of stress, although the doctors had warned that this was a possibility. He said on that occasion: “Again I have become indebted to the Blessed Virgin. . . Could I forget that the event in Saint Peter’s Square took place on the day and at the hour when the first appearance of the Mother of Christ to the poor little peasants has been remembered for over sixty years at Fatima in Portugal? For in everything that happened to me on that very day, I felt that extraordinary motherly protection and care, which turned out to be stronger than the deadly bullet.”⁹⁶

In conclusion, the harmony between the vocation to true philosophy and Mary’s vocation has many points of contact. Mary, as a type of philosopher, sitting in thought at the altar which provided the bread of life to the world gives us much to ponder. We have considered Mary’s personal acts of intellect and will at the Annunciation, her communal sharing of vocation at the Visitation, her symbolic receptivity to faith and reason at the Epiphany, her generous and thoughtful acts of love at Cana, her consistent willingness to walk with and stand by the Transcendent God, her beloved Son, in the presence of the evils surrounding Him and whose weight were carried by His Cross, and her continued availability to teach us through the Holy Spirit after her glorious Assumption. May we be reminded whenever we are at an altar of the Eucharist, Cross, banquet, desk, podium, or seminar table, that God and Mary gently but persistently invite us

⁹³ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 221.

⁹⁴ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold*, 200–21.

⁹⁵ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, 159.

⁹⁶ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, 163.

into a deeper love and fidelity to our vocation to become Christian philosophers, foreknown and called to be conformed to the image of the Beloved Son.⁹⁷

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⁹⁷ With gratitude for suggestions for composition and revision of this paper by John Hittinger, PhD, Michael Torre, PhD, Marica Frank, PhD, Michael Woodward, PhD, Sr. Rita Rae Schneider, RSM, PhD, Sr. Mary Judith O'Brien, RSM, JD, JCD, Sr. Esther Mary Nickel, RSM, SLD, Mother Mary Quentin, RSM, Superior General, and Mother Mary McGreevy, RSM, Vicar General, Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan. It was presented at the *American Maritain Association Conference*, Washington DC, October 14, 2005.