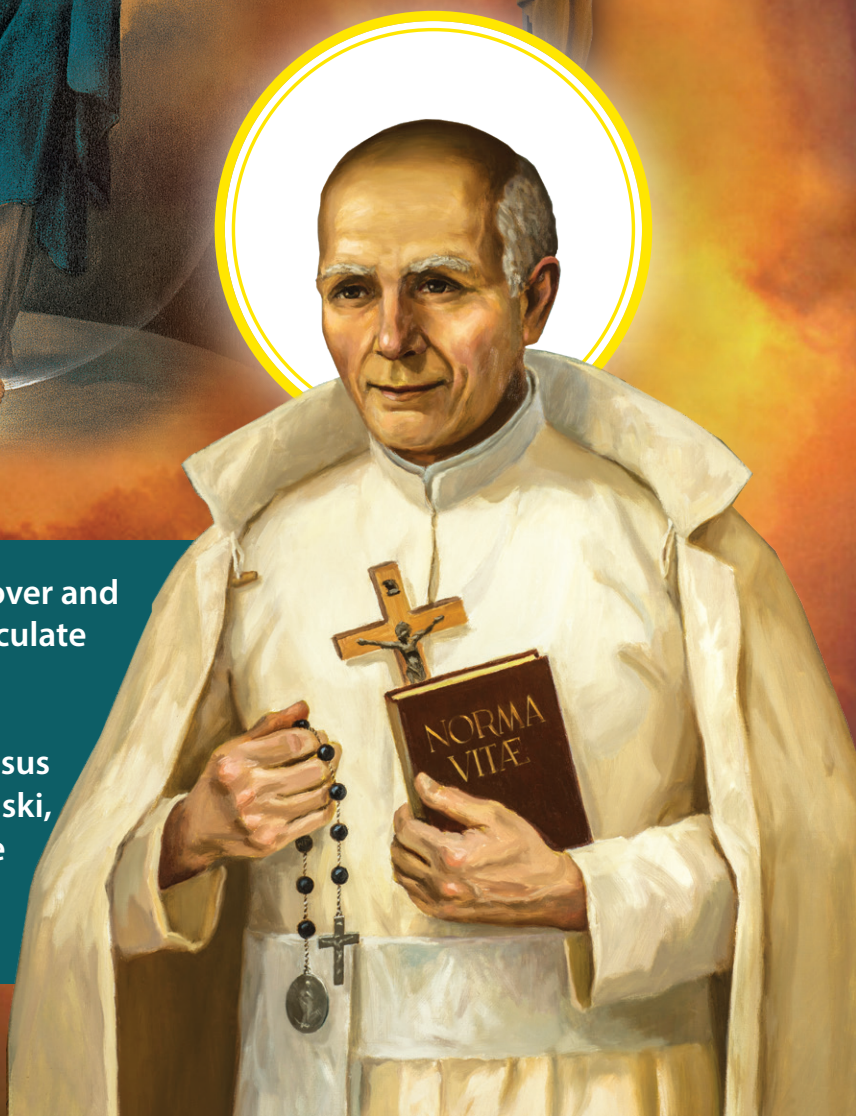


Bogusław Gil, MIC

THE SIGNS OF THE MYSTERY

Christ as our Passover and
Mary as the Immaculate
Conception in the
Experience of
St. Stanislaus of Jesus
and Mary Papczyński,
the Founder of the
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Father Bogusław Gil, MIC

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English translation:

Irena Bartczak

Cover design:

Gabriela Sylwestrowicz

Composition of the book:

Kathy Szpak

ISBN 978-1-59614-611-2

Websites:

PadriMariani.org

Marian.org

All the biblical passages, unless otherwise stated,
from The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB),
Darton, Longman and Todd and Les Editions du Cerf, 1985

Imprimi potest

Very Rev. Chris Alar, MIC

Provincial Superior

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy Province

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

January 1, 2024

Printed and bound in Poland.



MARIAN
HERITAGE
STOCKBRIDGE, MA, USA

PROMIC

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INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the duty of general chapters and those who govern individual religious congregations, including our Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, is to strive to achieve coherence between the present reality of the community and the *original intention* of its founder, both at a theological and legal level. Preserving the *identity* of the religious family established by the founder is essential, despite the time that has passed since the founding. Nevertheless, well-crafted theological and legal regulations in constitutions will remain a mere formality if a congregation's individual members are not *inwardly* drawn and motivated by the charism of their founder. They must hold a deep sense of responsibility towards it and firmly *engrave it* on their hearts. This occurred to our Father and Founder, St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński. Inspired by a *divine vision*,¹ he was led to establish a new religious community. In this role, he is the most significant and necessary reference point for fulfilling the charism received through him for the good of the whole Church. This charism is to serve the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ and the Church.

Therefore, the way St. Stanislaus discovered, embraced, and embodied this charism should always be an example for all members of his Congregation, though it remains unparalleled. It would be strange, even unreasonable, to imagine a life in accordance with the Franciscan charism without acknowledging the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi or to achieve the Jesuit ideal without taking inspiration from St. Ignatius of Loyola. Similarly, a Marian disregarding or remaining indifferent towards St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary would lack a relationship of *spiritual sonship* towards the Father Founder, significantly impacting his ability to embody the Marian identity. Studying the problem of a charism regarding the laws of religious congregations, an expert in this field noted that:

Most often, its [charism's] sense is narrowed only to the purpose of existence of an institute. Its expression in constitutions usually comes down to the most faithful description in the first

¹ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 6, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings* (PROMIC, Warsaw-Stockbridge, MA: Marian Heritage, 2022), 903–904.

chapter of the constitutions, entitled, e.g. *The Charism of the Institute, Spirituality of the Institute* or *The Nature of the Institute*, etc. A charism penetrates the whole life of an institute and its every aspect. It is essential to incorporate this principle into every section of the constitutions, including those on governance, apostolate, detachment from worldly affairs, formation, and the management of material assets. It should not be limited only to the first chapter.²

Furthermore, it is imperative that a congregation's charism is not only expressed in the constitutions but also evident in daily life of its members. This is particularly crucial at the beginning of their vocations but perhaps more imperative during the later stages of their spiritual growth, when every fully professed member should be clearly living out this charism. The question becomes, What is a charism? Relying on many experts on the subject and Church documents, the author cited above writes:

Etymologically, the word "charism" comes from the Greek word *charisma*, which has its roots in the word *charis*, meaning "grace," and the suffix *ma*, meaning an "act of grace," "a gift of grace," a "freely given gift." St. Thomas Aquinas wrote about a charism as freely given grace (*gratia gratis data*) instead of sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*), whose granting requires some predispositions on the receiver's part. In contrast, a freely given charism can be granted regardless of the receiver's disposition because it is not endowed for their sanctification but for the good of the whole community of the Church. The task of the one gifted with charism is helping others in their striving to unite with God. But usually, charism also affects the spiritual growth of the receiver.³

In this aspect, considering St. Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński, there is no doubt that the charism given to him by God concerning the foundation of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary changed his whole life, by making him the Father and Founder of the Congregation, which still must mature

² Bożena Szewczul, "Problematyka odzwierciedlenia charyzmatu instytutu zakonnego w jego prawie własnym," [The problem of reflecting a charism of a religious institute in its own law] *Prawo Kanoniczne* 58, no. 3 (2015): p. 66.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 66–67.

to the *Divina visio* revealed to its Founder. This charism also required some *predispositions* to accept this gift. This, in fact, does not quite fit the *definition of charism* quoted above. The expression, *definition of charism*, contains an inherent contradiction. As a gift of grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit, it cannot be limited to a static definition. Always dynamic and freely given, its acceptance requires individuals to obtain new minds and new hearts that are continuously and unconditionally receptive to it. Charism is, therefore, to be discovered and accepted, not defined.

The greatest obstacle in understanding and accepting the grace of the Congregation's charism is the temptation to give it a technical definition, reducing it to a few smooth sentences to be included in the constitutions or norms of formation and thus fulfill our duty to it. However, the charism derived from the Holy Spirit requires an ongoing theological, not technical or mechanical, interpretation. This approach enables the Congregation to discern its priorities. By using the term "theological," I am not referencing any specific methodology associated with academic theology. Theology is a scientific discipline, but, above all, it is a way to view things through God's eyes. It is seeking to understand faith and an effort to explain and witness to our hope in Christ. No member of the faithful, or person professing faith in Christ, can be exempt from a theological perspective. We must daily endeavor to view our lives through the lens of Christ's teachings rather than through a human perspective shaped by our social and cultural norms and current trends.

To answer the challenges the Marians faced in the Jubilee of the 350th anniversary of the Congregation, I will share my path to a more complete understanding of St. Fr. Stanislaus in these short theological reflections. This path started for me many years ago, in 1993, when I entered the Congregation. However, it only became more distinct during my profound studies of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of the Lord, which began in 2008. My missionary work in Vietnam since 2015, where I promote the charism of the Marian Fathers and have observed the attraction St. Fr. Stanislaus' lifestyle has for young Vietnamese Catholics, has also significantly influenced my understanding of the charism.

The mystery of the *personal relationship* between Christ and his Mother, which is the Mystery of the Holy Spirit as the uncreated Divine Immaculate Conception, and God's power of begetting the Son have assisted me to understand the person and vocation of St. Stanislaus

Papczyński, whom God's Providence has given us as a witness and a sign of this mystery. The key, I believe, lies in the Father Founder's reference to Jesus and Mary in his religious name. The name *Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary* expressed the vocation he would fulfill by founding our Congregation, at the time determined by God Himself. It does not mean that at the beginning Fr. Stanislaus knew and fully understood the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and God's will for himself. God called him to be a witness, not an expert, on the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. By being faithful to God's will, seeking it, and always putting it first, he bore witness to the depth — and simplicity — of this mystery. He also became a sign of the mystery, through his *Oblatio*. Through this act, which contains the essence of the mystery, the Immaculate Conception of Mary and St. Stanislaus' life purpose were united forever.

Although appearing unrelated, the three chapters of this book are linked by the figure of St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary. Because he is "of Jesus," it was necessary for him to enter into the mystery of the identity of the Suffering Christ (*Christus Patiens*) and the Crucified Orator (*Orator Crucifixus*), Who is our Passover (cf. 1 Cor 5:7). Because he is simultaneously "of Mary," Father Founder focuses us on the mystery of the relationship between Mary and her Son. This relationship originates in the Holy Spirit and determines the identity of the Virgin Mother, confirmed by herself in Lourdes when on March 25, 1858, she said: "I am the Immaculate Conception." In the final part of these reflections, I theologically interpret Fr. Stanislaus' life and work in light of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, whose signs he discovered and entrusted to his spiritual sons. Father Stanislaus continues to serve this mystery, through the Congregation he founded, which proclaims the Good News about salvation in Christ, to the living and the departed still in need of the Church's motherly gift, a mission which the Marians are called to demonstrate.

CHAPTER 1

Christ as our Passover — the Interpretative Key of the Mystery of Man and God

At the beginning of his epoch-making pontificate, which centered on preparing the Church and the world for a conscious entry into the third Christian millennium, St. John Paul II wrote that “Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique, unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his ‘heart.’” These words of the saintly pope become more profound in reference to the famous statement of the Second Vatican Council:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and brings to light his most high calling.⁴

The highest and most fundamental vocation of every man is to *become* authentically Christlike, a “son or daughter in the Son,” because the life of every person is a *story of becoming*. We carry the ingrained law of over time becoming who we already are, thanks to the gift of our vocation. During our lifetime, through everyday choices, decisions, and acts, we *become* either *sons in the Son* or *children of disobedience*. If we were sons by nature, we would not need *time* because we would have lived *immediately* in eternity. However there is only One Son. Those destined to become sons and daughters in Him need time to accept the Son and let Him be formed within them (cf. Gal 4:19). The life of every man seen from such a perspective is *kairos*, the time of salvation, the time of becoming the image of the One in Whom and for Whom everything was created (cf. Col 1:15–20). This transformation does not only involve abandoning “the old man” with his burden of sin but also lessening the distance between

⁴ St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, March 4, 1979, No. 8, in <http://www.vatican.va/john-paul-II/encyclicals/documents>.

the Creator and the creation. Of course, sins further increase this distance. Still, the time entrusted to man should not be considered only a struggle against sin but primarily as the grace of “adoption to sonship.” It is the time when the seed — ourselves — must die in order to grow and yield a rich harvest (cf. Jn 12:24–26). In this time the embryo conceived through Baptism (cf. Eph 4:15) and the call to holiness, becomes a man in the image of Christ.

We can also see this path of growth and *becoming* — although on a different level, as there is no question of sin — in Jesus and Mary, the new Adam and Eve. Christ, though the Son by nature, “for us men and for our salvation,” *became* Man, and, as Man, he never ceased to be, and to *become*, the Father’s Only Begotten Son, opening for us a way to salvation. Becoming the Son relates to Christ’s human nature, which, although assumed in reality and once and for all through the Incarnation, remained human and, in a way, required constant *acceptance* throughout the Son of Man’s earthly life. Despite being God from God, Light from Light, the Son Whom the Father begot and is begetting *in a moment*, which is an infinite and dynamic eternity, each day Christ was becoming the Son also as Man. Saint John the Evangelist, whom the Eastern Church calls “the Theologian,” shows Christ’s becoming the Son in the sign of *washing the disciples’ feet* (cf. Jn 13:1–19). Saint Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speak about *obedience*, which Christ, being in the form of God and being the Son, learned through suffering and emptying Himself to death on a Cross (cf. Phil 2:6–11; Heb 5:8).

There is nothing in Mary which would not be in Christ. Because she, by receiving “new life” from the One to whom she gave life in the order of nature,⁵ becomes truly the new Eve, the new creation in Christ, the Immaculate Conception, the Mother.

1. The Theology of the Paschal Mystery

“Get rid of all the old yeast, and make yourselves into a completely new batch of dough, unleavened as you are meant to be. Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). These words by St. Paul cannot be accepted indifferently by anyone who professes to be a Christian. They should especially touch those who entered a path of religious life and priestly ministry. These words are a clear call to a change of heart (*metanoia*), which we call

⁵ Cf. St. John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, March 25, 1987, No. 10.

conversion, a radical rejection of sin — the “old yeast” of thinking and acting only in human ways which makes a man into an obstacle preventing himself and others from reaching the goal set for them by God. This change is, most of all, a return to the Source of Christian life, the Lord, Jesus Christ, sacrificed as “our Passover,” our passage from purely human life to life according to the Spirit. To Peter, who had not yet understood the mystery of God’s plan, and was thinking only in human terms of profit and success, Jesus spoke harshly and directly: “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does but as human beings do” (Mt 16:23).

Therefore, only the Crucified and Risen Christ, Who lives eternally in the mystery of His Passover, can truly serve as the driving and intentional force behind the transformation of life, which is known as conversion. This transformation involves transitioning from an existence resembling Adam to a genuine life resembling Christ. The successor of John Paul II in the See of Peter, the pope theologian Benedict XVI, expressed it in his own clear and precise way:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, or a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John’s Gospel describes that event in these words: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should ... have eternal life” (3:16).⁶

This *encounter* with the person of the Lord living in the Church is possible only because of the event of His Resurrection. Such a statement may seem obvious or banal today. However, to discover the central meaning of the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ, we needed the Second Vatican Council, so criticized recently by many pseudo-reformers of the Church. This council made Catholic theology and spirituality recognize the shining light of the truth of the Resurrection and consider not only the apologetical meaning of this most important redemptive event but also its soteriological dimension,⁷ which refers directly to our way of thinking and acting.

⁶ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, January 25, 2006, No. 1.

⁷ “It is important to emphasize at the outset that the discussion of the soteriological aspect of the Resurrection stems from recent developments in Catholic theology. Previously, when addressing the topic of redemption, the Resurrection was either overlooked entirely or given significantly less importance. Redemption was primarily associated with the event of Calvary, and the mysteries of Christ’s incarnation, His earthly life and death, were given greater emphasis

All the Catholic and apostolic truths of the faith are intertwined and mutually related (*nexus mysteriorum*) and concern man's salvation in the Crucified and Risen Christ. However, the guarantee of their authenticity is precisely the Resurrection of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 15:12–20). As the Risen One, Jesus Christ is always *present* and *accessible* in His Church, which is His Body (1 Cor 12:12–13:27) and Bride (Eph 5:25–32). Therefore, every truly faithful person, remaining in *communion* with Christ and the Church, can and should experience salvation by entering into a *personal relationship* with the Trinitarian God, through meditating on the Word of God and participating in the Sacraments of the Church. Redemption and salvation are not simply historical events that occurred in the past, through the incarnation, birth, life, and crucifixion of the Man, Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem two millennia ago (as viewed from a positivistic and historical perspective). Instead, they represent the *spiritual reality* and *parousial/eschatological presence* of the Person of the Paschal Christ, Who truly lives in our present “here and now” through the Divine power of His Resurrection. Through faith, everyone is invited to enter into a *redemptive relationship* with Him and experience the salvation He won for us.

1.1 The Juridical Theology

The category of *relationship* and *communion*, so crucial for proper understanding of the eschatological mystery of salvation in Christ, was never sufficiently present in the past. In fact, it was not considered at

in terms of their salvific significance. The focus was on the nature of repair, atonement, and merit, and these considerations were deemed sufficient. The Resurrection was largely considered from an apologetic standpoint. The reasoning followed a pattern: the Resurrection proves the truth of Jesus of Nazareth's teachings, validates His divinity through miracles, guarantees the authenticity of Christ's teachings, and above all, confirms the truth of the statement 'I AM,' in which Jesus claims the Divine name and affirms his identity with the nature of God. (Jn 8:28, 8:24–58, Mt 26:63, Mt 14:62, Lk 22:70). Theology today places a greater emphasis on the soteriological dimension of the Resurrection. However, it is important to note that in order to fully understand the apologetic nature of the Resurrection, its soteriological value must also be explained. While the historical fact of the Resurrection serves as proof of the truthfulness of Jesus' message and confirmation of His divinity, the ongoing gift of life to the Church and to Christians by the Risen Christ is equally significant. The soteriological aspect is strongly emphasized by St. Paul in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (15:14, 17): 'If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without substance, and so is your faith. ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is pointless and you have not, after all, been released from your sins.' Here, the effectiveness of this event for forgiveness of sins is emphasized. Salvation comes from the Risen Christ." Czesław Rychlicki, "Związek między śmiercią Chrystusa i jego zmartwychwstaniem: wyjaśnienie teologiczne," [The connection between the death of Christ and His Resurrection: theological explanation] *Studia Płockie* 2 (1974): p. 42–43).

all in a certain method of thinking and speaking about God, which the outstanding representative of the theology of the Paschal mystery, François-Xavier Durrwell, used to call *juridical theology*.⁸ For centuries, the Latin Western tradition, both Catholic and Protestant, has predominantly employed a judicial approach to unveil the mysteries of God. This style persists even today, although more than 50 years have passed since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council.

As I noted previously in quoting Czesław Rychlicki, in the system of juridical theology, the Resurrection is not the center of the mystery of salvation. Instead, the emphasis is on its apologetic rather than soteriological dimension. Christ's suffering and death on the Cross are often regarded as the ultimate objective, rather than viewed as His *passage* to the Father, the *narrow gate*, the path that the Son had to traverse to rejoice in the Father's glory, which He had since before the creation of the world (see Jn 17:5). According to this theology, a man is not saved by the Person of Christ *united* with the Father and being in constant *relationship* with Him, but only through suffering of the Savior and His death on the Cross, as if it were just the matter of making reparation to God's disrespected justice, understood from the human perspective as *satisfaction* or almost *taking revenge*. It also claims that people are not redeemed through *communion* with the Resurrected Lord, living in the mystery of His suffering and death, but through *applying* (a legal and judicial term is no coincidence here) His merits, objectified and detached from the Person of the Redeemer and as if virtually existing in a special "heavenly vault."⁹ Through faith, this theological system claims, one does not enter into unity and communion with the Paschal Christ but merely uses the *merits* of His salvific death, regarded as an event from the past. This juridical theology promotes an image of God as a severe Judge, Who demands legal justice (satisfaction for the offence). He forgives only when the fault is remedied and expiated through the death of Christ, shown here not as the Paschal Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world by immersing it in the *fire* of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 1:29–33, 8:46) but instead as the "scapegoat" (a substitute) from the Book of Leviticus (see Lev 16:7–22) on which the high priest symbolically placed the sin of the people before sending it

⁸ François-Xavier Durrwell, *Christ Our Passover: The Indispensable Role of Resurrection in Our Salvation* (Hampshire: Redemptorist Publications, 2004), p. 37–39.

⁹ See Giuseppe Forlai, *L'irruzione della Grazia. Per una rilettura ecumenica del dogma dell'Immacolata* (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo, 2010), p. 386.

out of the camp.¹⁰ God's justice, although otherwise crucial for a proper understanding of God's mystery, appears here more as a judicial right of the offended God Whose anger must be appeased by Jesus' death¹¹ and not as an authentic Mercy of the Father Who loves the world so much that "he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). It is difficult to reconcile this with the image of God shown by Jesus in the parables about the Merciful

¹⁰ In Durrwell's understanding, the scapegoat is a symbol of the theory of substitution, according to which Jesus died abandoned and separated from the Father, crushed by the burden of the world's sin and God's justice, which fell on Him instead of sinful mankind. This theory held that salvation consisted of Jesus, the Innocent Lamb, becoming "the embodiment of sin," upon which God's righteous anger turned. Preachers in the post-reformation era competed to promote such theology, and during his famous Lenten sermons preached in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris, one such preacher shouted, "God sees in him [Jesus] living sin ... His divine body becomes, instead of ours, a cursed object Before him, God's justice forgets about a vulgar mob of people and sees only this weird and monstrous thing as his due satisfaction. Spare him, spare him, Lord, after all, it is your Son. — No, no, it is sin that has to be punished." Bernard Sesboüé, *Jésus-Christ l'unique Médiateur. Essai sur la rédemption et le salut* (Paris: Desclée, 1988), p. 74–75. The proponents of this theory derived from juridical theology invoked two fragments from the New Testament in particular: 2 Cor 5:21 ("For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him") and Gal 3:13 ("Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us"). Supporters of the theory of substitution interpret these two lines literally without considering their context and the author's message. Additionally, one can add the First Epistle of Peter to these verses: 1 Pet 2:22–24 ("He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered he did not threaten; instead he handed himself over to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.") It is important to remember that these texts do not suggest that Christ identifies himself with sin, but rather with sinners. God hates sin but loves sinners. Thus, Christ does not embody sin, but rather stands in solidarity with humanity, even though we are sinners. Through faith in Christ, we enter into communion with the Trinitarian God and are justified. Where God is present, sin cannot be. Christ is not the scapegoat of the Book of Leviticus (see Lev 16:20–22), upon whom the sins of the world were laid and which he carried on himself, separated from the Father. He is the Lamb of God of the Gospel of John (see Jn 1:29–31, 19:36) Who, through His death, enters into perfect communion with the Father. In His death and Resurrection, He is begotten by the Father and thus takes away the sins of every person who believes in Him. (see John 3:18). See also Durrwell, *Christ Our Passover*, p. 43–51, 69.

¹¹ False images of God the Father are sometimes influenced by a much-coarsened version of St. Anselm of Canterbury's theology of atonement. According to this idea, man's sin offended God, and this offence is infinite because the offended is infinite. Rectifying the infinite offence requires an infinite expiation. Man — as a finite creature — is not capable of such an expiation. Therefore, God sends his Son to redeem man's sin. The severe God can be propitiated by the sacrifice of His Son's blood. Joseph Ratzinger points out that it cannot be denied that "the perfectly logical divine-*cum*-human legal system erected by Anselm distorts the perspectives and with its rigid logic can make the image of God appear in a sinister light." Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 102. "Indeed, the simplified theory of satisfaction makes us think of the severe Father whose anger may be placated only with suffering and death of the Son on the cross." Dariusz Kowalczyk, "O Bogu Ojcu, który współcierpiał," [About God the Father who co-suffered] accessed November 22, 2017, <http://teologia.jezuici.pl/category/autorzy/dariusz-kowalczyk/>.

Father (*see* Lk 15:11–32) or the Good Shepherd searching for a lost sheep (*see* Lk 15:3–7).

Therefore, one should not juxtapose God's justice with His Mercy as both these realities reveal God's fatherly heart. But the New Testament message is clear: "mercy triumphs over judgement" (Jas 2:13). This entails a genuine demonstration of mercy, modelled on that of God Himself. It does not imply a tolerance of evil or an affirmation of moral deviation, rather the act of forgiving a person's sin when he or she genuinely acknowledges guilt, as illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son (*see* Lk 15:18–20). Erroneous understandings of mercy and a caricature of human justice attributed to God distort His image and prevent a man from discovering and loving the only true God Who revealed Himself in Christ.

1.2 The Paschal Theology

The solution offered by *the Paschal theology* seems to be most proper and faithful to the authentic Apostolic Tradition of the New Testament and teachings of the Church Fathers. One of the most prominent representatives of this theological method is the previously mentioned French Redemptorist François-Xavier Durrwell and, in the Polish context, a theologian from Lublin, Fr. Wacław Hryniewicz, OMI. In Paschal theology, the key categories explaining the mystery of Triune God revealing Himself in the Paschal mystery of Christ are *person*, *communion*, *relation*, and *gift*. Redemption and salvation are made in the *Person* of Christ by His Filial *relationship* with the Father, when, through death and Resurrection, He *becomes* the Son of God as the Son of Man, through His obedience to the Father, as befits the Son of God, Whom Christ has always been as the eternal Logos. Christ's human nature fully partakes in the mystery of the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father in the Holy Spirit through His incarnation. Through faith, every person enters into a *personal relationship* with Christ, the Son of God, and experiences *salvation* and *communion* with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the *relationship* uniting the Father and the Son. He is the *Gift* of the Father and the Son, realizing man's salvation "here and now." In Him, the Father is eternally giving life to the Son. In Him, the faithful, *born again through the Spirit* (cf. Jn 3:1–8), *become* children of God through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, Who is constantly *present* and *accessible* in the mystery of His Resurrection (cf. Jn 20:1–31). The Sacraments of the

Church, especially the Eucharist, manifest this *presence* and make it possible to truly *experience* salvation by *accepting the Gift* given freely by God Himself. The Christian faith is the acceptance of the Triune God revealing Himself in Christ and a response to His gift. Therefore, faith is not only an intellectual and voluntary acceptance of the truths revealed by God and presented for belief by the Church, but rather a *lifestyle* that goes beyond what is purely human. The Gospel can be neither understood nor accepted through human thinking. In contrast to all worldly philosophies and fashionable ideologies that feed themselves with human desires (such as “sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life” (1 Jn 2:16), the Gospel calls for simplicity and self-denying, prudent love.

2. The Mystery of Man in Christ

Man will never understand himself without the Paschal Christ and certainly will not unravel the mystery of death that most fascinates and frightens him. As a mystery, death is also the key to explaining the meaning of life. As a key, it can either unlock or lock, depending on the direction it is turned. A theologian of the Paschal mystery notes that:

the One who holds the *keys of death* (cf. Rev 1:18) has given the right direction to the rotation of the key. When Jesus died something happened to the death itself. It immediately changed its character. The ancient curse: “you are doomed to die” (Gen 2:17) changes into “We have come here to tell you the good news that the promise made to our ancestors has come about. God has fulfilled it ... by raising Jesus from the dead” (Acts 13:32–33). “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54).¹²

Therefore, since this cosmic event of the death and Resurrection of Christ, Resurrection —not death — remains the last word concerning man. Man, whom according to nature is-destined for death, becomes a genuinely living creature destined for life, an authentic Adam in the Crucified and Risen Christ. However, this does not refer to life in terms of human nature, or the material dimension of human existence. True life in Christ is a life according to the Spirit in which the Father eternally begets

¹² François-Xavier Durrwell, *Chrystus, człowiek i śmierć*, trans. W. Misztal (Kraków: Salvator 2017), p. 11. Originally published as *Le Christ, l'homme et la mort*, Médiaspaul, 1991.

the Son, raising Him from death and declaring: “You are my son: this day I have begotten you.” (Acts 13:33).

By believing in Christ and trusting Him, a man receives new eyes of faith, capable of seeing farther and more profoundly than his earthly eyes, which only observe the external and temporary. Faith in Christ also frees a man from the fear of death (cf. Heb 2:15), as it allows us to understand that death is not as it seems. It appears to be an end of life and existence, destruction. However in Christ, death becomes the opposite: the Passover, a passage to a new life with Christ in God, a beginning of eternal life by the Spirit. To understand death, one must arrive at Calvary, at the Cross of the Suffering Christ. Those who surrounded Him in the moment of His agony and looked at Him with bodily eyes alone saw only His humiliation, pain, suffering, and finally, death — the dead body of the Man called Jesus of Nazareth. However, the one who, through faith, had already become a participant in the Paschal Mystery saw in his Master’s death the revelation of God’s Glory and His exaltation. I am referring to John, the beloved disciple, who stood with Jesus’ mother at the foot of the Cross. (cf. Jn 19:25–27). Looking with eyes of faith at the dying Christ, the Paschal Lamb slain for our sins (cf. Is 53:5, Jn 19:36–37), the disciple could understand that in the One who had become our Passover, death and life did not contradict each other. He never forgot the Lord’s words: “Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live” (Jn 11:25). Additionally, for St. Paul, the death of Jesus had become the most remarkable grace which allowed him to live in communion with the Master and be immersed, through Baptism, into His death: “Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:3). Thus, at the moment of our Baptism, we enter into the mystery of death and die to ourselves, an illustration of Christ’s mystery of a grain of wheat which must die to yield a harvest: “Amen, amen I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it; and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.” (Jn 12:24–25).

Thus, the mystery of death in Christ gives meaning to the whole earthly life of man. It reveals the eschatological dimension of life and shows the path to living well in the time allotted to all in this world. It is the way of self-denial and acceptance of the cross, following the example of Jesus, Who guides and perfects our faith (cf. Heb 12:2). Faith is not merely a free assent of mind and will to the whole truth revealed by God

and proclaimed by the Church, but rather personally following Christ and living in the Church according to the Gospel interpreted by Church Tradition. Ultimately, it involves passing from death to life with Christ on the day of our definitive encounter with Him, which marks the end of our time in this world: “You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of man will come” (Lk 12:40).

2.1 Encounter with the Paschal Christ

Jesus will come, as always, to *meet* us. The concept of a *personal encounter* with Christ is one of the most important categories of Paschal theology. He meets us as the Alpha and the Omega, Who was, Who is, and Who is to come (cf. Rev 1:8) in every moment of our Christian life. He is especially present in the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and ultimately in the final moment of our life, which we call death. During a funeral Mass, we pray from the Preface for the Dead, “Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed, not ended.” What seems to be *the end* without Christ, is *the beginning* in Christ, because He is the Beginning and the End of every life created in Him.

Therefore, it was necessary that He also, as the Messiah, suffered and through death entered His glory (cf. Lk 24:26), that He might reign over the dead and the living (cf. Rom 14:9). In His first coming, His presence among the disciples was limited by the time and space of the earthly dimension of His human life. However, through death and Resurrection, *parousial* by nature, the presence of Christ becomes universal and concerns all people regardless of their religion, race, culture, or historical time. Christ died for everyone, and everyone can meet Him and accept Him through faith in the Church, which is catholic — that is open to every person who *believes*. The last chance to *meet* Christ is death. It is an inevitable necessity for all to *meet* Christ the Redeemer, in death, through which everyone must pass. Christ is the Savior and salvation of every man, because He, as the Risen Lord, lives forever in the mystery of His death (cf. Rev 1:18). As the Risen Lord, He comes to meet all those who die in Adam to be brought to life in Him, the Paschal Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:22).

The sin of Adam, which burdens unbelievers, causes a transition to life and a part of the fleeting nature of man and the world to be called *death*. On the other hand, blind fulfillment of sometimes the lowest desires and urges, which results in self-destruction and the breaking of relationships

with God and others, is called *real life*. Even though Christ, the Paschal Lamb, Who takes away the sin of the world (cf. Jn 1:29), has removed this sin, for His Paschal victory over death, sin, and Satan to be effective in the life of a person, he or she must *believe*: Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. (cf. Mk 16:16).

To believe means to freely and personally accept Christ and His *way of living and dying*. Faith is not automatic or magic. It involves personal adherence and the voluntary surrender of oneself to God in Christ. Thus, men's salvation or condemnation depends mainly on their free and personal choice. Without Christ, the Paschal Lamb, there is no salvation, because "there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12). Here originates the missionary work regarding the evangelization of the world carried out by the Church, established to proclaim the good news of salvation: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). How is the Good News supposed to reach everyone living on earth when the Church's impact is limited for many reasons, despite increasing possibilities of media communication? The answer is simple. The effectiveness of the work of evangelization does not depend on the quality and quantity of new media but on the power of faith of the Church in the real *presence* and *salvific action* of the Paschal Christ, Who comes to proclaim the Gospel even to the dead (cf. 1 Pet 4:6).

2.2 Purification in the Ultimate Encounter with Christ

Faith in the redemptive presence of Christ, Who lives forever in the mystery of His death and Resurrection, is nourished and strengthened through active participation in the Sacraments of the Church (especially the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist). The ultimate purpose of faith is to guide individuals towards their final goal — the acceptance of Christ at the last encounter with Him in the hour of death.

The truth that every human person meets Christ after death was testified by Christianity when the Church taught with great emphasis on "the particular judgment." Raising Jesus, "God has appointed him to judge everyone, alive or dead" (Acts 10:42). At the end of earthly life, every person meets the Judge who decides about an eternal reward or punishment. However, speaking in

this manner, one expresses in legal terms the ultimate grace, the grace of encounter with Christ who saves a man in his death.¹³

Thus, at the hour of death, Christ reveals Himself as *Savior and salvation* offered to all as the personal Good News. In their freedom, people can accept this gift and enter life or reject it and be annihilated in the mystery of their iniquity (*mysterium iniquitatis*).

Each authentic meeting with the Savior during earthly life purifies us, releasing us from ourselves and our sins. It mainly occurs in the Sacrament of Penance, which is always an actualization of the grace of Baptism, immersing us in the death and Resurrection of our Lord. Although the salvific power of the Sacrament does not depend on man, its effectiveness is closely related to our faith.

Always certain Christians have ardently believed and opened their hearts to the action of the Holy Spirit, abundantly granted by Christ, to the point that already during their earthly life, they attained close unity and communion with the Giver of the Spirit, the Paschal Lamb. They are able to joyfully accept the Christ-like way of dying in the flesh and living according to the Spirit (cf. Jn 12:25–26). We call them *saints*, as they did not love their lives and accepted death (cf. Rev 12:11). “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). Consciously accepting death and dying to themselves on earth for the sake of Christ gave them the fullness of life, called love. That is why when their moment of “passing from this world to the Father” arrived, they could freely and consciously say: “I long to depart this life and be with Christ” (Phil 1:23), or, like St. Francis of Assisi, they could praise the Lord “through Sister Death, from whom no one living can escape.” For saints, this moment of passage has always been *dies natalis*, a birthday into eternal life, where they will never hunger or thirst, where the Lamb will be their shepherd and wipe away all tears from their eyes (cf. Rev 7:16–17).

But what happens to those who only believed partially? Unlike the poor widow Jesus observed at the Temple treasury (cf. Mk 12:38–44), they have not fully surrendered themselves to the Lord but instead succumbed to the temptation to serve two masters. (cf. Mt 6:24). The tradition of faith speaks here about the necessity of *Purgatory*, which according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is “the final purification of the elect.”¹⁴ The final and

¹³ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁴ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), No. 1031.

complete purification occurs when the people meet Christ as Savior and Redeemer. They can accept or reject Him according to their amount of freedom and love, but they cannot encounter Him with indifference. No person dies without Christ, Who is the Passover of every human person. "Passover" means his or her passage from temporal reality to eternity. Christ was proclaimed the universal mediator between God and every man, regardless of whether one accepts this truth or not. Thus, Christ does not meet any people already *purified* by their efforts and righteousness, because no such purification exists. Only God has prepared for us good and pious works, in order that we might perform them as a sign of our purification accomplished only by His grace (cf. Eph 2:10). Without God, our good actions are like the "blood of goats and bull calves," which, although accomplished ritual purification, did not free the human conscience from the burden of sin, because only the blood of Christ shed for the forgiveness of sins releases man from his dead works and makes him capable of entering God's glory (cf. Heb 9:13–14). Meeting Christ and accepting Him (the ultimate "yes" spoken to God) purifies man, because no one can save himself nor pay God a price for his redemption (cf. Ps 49:8).

It is the encounter with him that purifies man. "We are well aware that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is." (1 Jn 3:2). Christ is our Passover (cf. 1 Cor 5:7), the Mediator of the passage; he is our Purgatory: on earth and in death. He is such in his death and the power of the Spirit that carries him from this world to the Father. He purifies a man in his salvific death, in the work of the Spirit, who brings him to the Father. If we were to name "the fire of Purgatory," it should be called the Holy Spirit. The gold of love is purified in love. A man is dynamized towards the Father by the Spirit of Divine filiation. Jesus is "the place" of cleansing, and the Spirit is his "fire."¹⁵

Despite his partial love, a man who has been granted the grace of Purgatory has an ultimate opportunity to accept Christ after crossing the border between time and eternity. Prayer for the souls in Purgatory, which is cherished by Church tradition and the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, is not primarily a request to God to overlook the imperfections of the deceased and ignore their

¹⁵ Durrwell, *Chrystus, człowiek i śmierć*, p. 66–67.

actions. Instead, it is a humble plea from the faithful that God, Who is rich in mercy (*dives in misericordia*), come to the aid of those who could not approach Him during their temporal lives due the paralyzing effects of sin. This prayer, made in faith, trusts in the power of the Church to intercede on behalf of the departed. In this context, the gospel story of Jesus healing a paralytic brought to Him by four people (cf. Mk 2:1–12) assumes its fuller eschatological dimension. Seeing the faith of these four friends, Jesus told the paralytic, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” (Mk 2:5). In praying for the dead, the Church brings them to Jesus like those four good people who brought the paralytic to Jesus in the Gospel. Through faith in Christ, they did something extraordinary and different from everyday, “rational” behavior. They lifted a sick person onto a house roof and, by lowering him through a hole in the roof, placed him closer to the Lord than anyone else gathered around. They enabled the paralytic to experience a salvific encounter with the Savior. Praying for the dead has a similar purpose: to assist them to an ultimate and complete acceptance of the Crucified Christ, a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor 1:23), made by God the Lord and Messiah, the only Mediator and Savior of every man (cf. Acts 4:12).

3. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

It is not a coincidence that when Christians profess their faith in Triune God, they make the Sign of the Cross on their body. Just as the Crucified and Risen Christ reveals the truth about humanity — a fact acknowledged even by Pontius Pilate’s words *Ecce Homo*, “behold the man” (Jn 19:5) — His death on the Cross and Resurrection from the dead ultimately reveal the Mystery of God, which is the Community of Persons. God, the only God and Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth and all things, does not exist alone.¹⁶ He is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8–10), and love as an interpersonal reality

¹⁶ The renowned biblical scholar, Fr. Waldemar Chrostowski, commented on the famous words from Genesis (Gen 1:26–27): “Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves,” and asked rhetorically, ‘Ourselves? God is the Only One!’ He then proceeded to answer his own question by stating that there is a plural used in the self-presentation of God throughout the text. When God speaks about himself, there is a plural, “in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves,” but when the biblical author speaks about God, he uses the singular and says, “in the image of God, he created him.” This makes it clear that the text is not promoting polytheism. ... Well, yes, when God presents himself, he lets us know that he is the Only One, but he does not exist alone. God reveals to us, and all those who have read and passed down the text from generation to generation, the richness of his inner life. While there is no proclamation of faith in the Holy Trinity here, as there is no mention of the Father, the Son, and

requires a community. It unites and integrates individuals, while respecting their freedom and individuality, requiring that each person love truly and selflessly, as if sacrificing oneself for other. That is why the Cross, as the sign of the greatest sacrifice – because there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (cf. Jn 15:12–17) – expresses most perfectly the trinitarian mystery. This mystery of the Love between the Father and the Son is of such magnitude that it exists as a Person — the Holy Spirit. This Love is the mystery of everlasting “dying to self” that gives space to the other and culminates in the highest sacrifice of self, the essence of the mystery of God, which finds its perfect expression in the Cross of Christ.

God lives as if in an eternal self-offering. When love is infinitely great, the sacrifice is also Infinite. God the Father cannot die like the Man [called] Jesus. Nevertheless, he shares the mystery of his Son's death with him.¹⁷

This is also the highest revelation of the mystery of God, Who is Love, a Community of Persons, and the Source and Power of every form of unity and communion among people created in His image.

Thus, the Cross, instead of being a sign of disgrace, scandal, suffering, and death, as it is when understood only in the human way, becomes the sign of God Himself, Who is Love. The essence of every true love is dying to yourself and offering yourself so that life could reveal itself. The beloved disciple of the Lord understood this well when he cited his namesake and the predecessor of Christ in his Gospel: “He must increase, I must decrease.” (Jn 3:30). Also the Apostle of the Nations, as a voice of all the faithful servants of God, must say:

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion or mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves,

the Holy Spirit, it is because at this stage it would not have been comprehensible and could be perceived as belief in three gods. Humanity was not yet ready to accept this truth. However, God allows us to see that he is not an absolute solitude.” Waldemar Chrostowski, *Wcielenie a Księga Rodzaju* [The Incarnation and the Genesis], (lecture, in Chrostowski, *Konferencje biblijne 2006/07–2017/18*, unauthorized transcript from the recordings of J. Paczyński, The Parish of the Annunciation of the Lord, Warsaw, November 17, 2014), p. 726–727.

¹⁷ Durrwell, *Le Christ, l'homme et la mort*, p. 128–129.

each one looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:1–4).

3.1 “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:3)

The God of the Revelation contained in the Holy Scripture and handed down by the Tradition of the Church is “God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Saint Paul says that “for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist.” (1 Cor 8:6). Theology calls this God revealed by Christ the First Person of the Holy Trinity. His essence is to be the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son, and, through Christ the Father and Creator of all existence. Jesus prays to this God, calling Him “Abba! Father!” and instructs His disciples to do so (cf. Mt 6:9). The mystery of God lies in this fatherhood hidden from understanding and acceptance by those learned and clever according to human perception and revealed to the childlike (cf. Mt 11:25–27). An emancipated mind and “scientific” worldview, which only accepts that accessible to its limited cognitive capabilities and in conformity to its ideological assumptions, opposes acceptance of the revealed truth about God’s fatherhood of mortal and suffering humanity. The guiding logic of profit and success at all costs is another hinderance. For as long as Peter’s distrustful question exists in man’s heart: “What will there be for us?” (cf. Mt 19:27), the mystery of God’s fatherhood towards man, which requires repentance and childlike trust (cf. Mt 18:3–4), remains only a pious abstraction.

However, the most formidable obstacle to faith in God as the Father Who cares about each member of His creations is the problem of suffering and death. I recall one of my teachers, who although very polite and kind to others, shrugged and coldly answered “no” when asked if he believed in the existence of a God who cared for every human being. Many people question the presence of a loving God as they observe unhappiness and suffering, such as innocent children born with illnesses and disabilities and the inevitable problem of death. Has God created death, too? Does He desire human pain and death?

We already find an answer to this question in the Book of Wisdom in the Old Testament:

For, not thinking rightly, they said among themselves: “Brief and troubled is our lifetime; there is no remedy for our dying, nor is anyone known to have come back from Hades. For by mere chance were we born, and hereafter we shall be as though we had not been. ... Come therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are here, and make use of creation with youthful zest.” ... These were their thoughts, but they erred; for their wickedness blinded them, they did not know the hidden counsels of God; neither did they count on a recompense for holiness nor discern the innocent souls’ reward. For God formed us to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made us. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are allied with him experience it (Wis 2:1–2, 6, 21–24).

What death is being discussed here? If we assume it is physical death, which usually means the end of a person’s life on earth, how does Jesus enter into this context? Jesus Christ, the Holy and the Righteous One, died, although death came into the world through the Devil’s envy. Only those who belong to the Devil are subject to death. Yet what of the host of patriarchs, prophets, and martyr-saints, who were stoned, sawn in half, and pierced by a sword, too good for the world as they wandered in deserts, mountains, and caves and ravines because of their faith (cf. Heb 11:37–39). Did they also, in their death, belong to the one who deceived Adam? By no means! Death, which entered the world through the Devil’s envy, is not physical, because God created people in a fatherly way and created them mortal, just as Jesus was mortal in His body, although we have been destined for eternity. God creates people to live. But since He creates them mortal, they are meant to reach the fullness of life through death. Thus, the conclusion should be drawn that physical death *is not deadly*. Although St. Paul, referring to the third chapter of the Book of Genesis, writes that “it was through one man that sin came into the world, and through sin death” (Rom 5:12), this death which “reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam” (Rom 5:14), is not a *deadly death*, because it does not result from sin but a natural necessity of a created material body.

The Scripture does not appear teach anywhere that man would be miraculously protected from death if there were no sin. The Scripture says quite the contrary: death depends on God’s will and decision (cf. Sir 41:4). It is a part of His creation plan. Death has a dual effect: It marks the

end of earthly life and the beginning of eternal life. However, sin rejects the possibility of eternal life. It shuts a man into his weaknesses and makes death a condemnation, an end without a beginning. Of course, St. Paul writes that death entered the world through sin (cf. Rom 5:12). But he also says that in Christ, the gift of grace disproportionately exceeds the damage made by sin (cf. Rom 5:15–17). “Hence, now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:1–2). Although the condemnation has been cancelled and the grace which repairs everything has been given in excess, a person faithful to Christ is still subject to death. If that is the case, death is not the result of condemnation. The Apostle even desired it as a grace (cf. 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21–23). The Church regards death as *dies natalis*, the day of birth on which God will bring His children to the fullness of their creation. Death, which entered the world through sin, is the man’s death through and in his sin.¹⁸

Therefore, sin changes and degenerates the sense of physical death included in God’s creative plan and imprinted into all of His creation. Christ’s redemptive death restores the meaning of death, as He teaches through His own life that the grain of wheat must die after falling into the ground to yield a rich harvest (cf. Jn 12:24) and fulfill its purpose. Grain is not created to remain in the same form continuously. Instead, through the mystery of dying, we, like the grain of wheat, can achieve the goal of existence — immortality in God and unity with Him. “Flesh and blood cannot

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 119–121. Many years ago, the topic of theological interpretations regarding the situation of man in the state of so called “original happiness” and their compliance with the Magisterium of the Church was explored by Fr. Ignacy Różycki, a prominent Polish dogmatist. In his exhaustive article, Fr. Różycki concluded, “All the deliberations on bodily immortality before the fall in the Bible justify the following scientifically fallibly certain – and epistemologically probable – conclusion: Neither references to Gen 2–3, nor the biblical rule that sin brings death on the sinner, give sufficient grounds for a claim that this immortality is the teaching of the Bible, substantially revealed and infallible.” Therefore, the stance of the Creed of the People of God issued by Pope Paul VI, that rejection of bodily immortality is dangerous for the faith, loses its biblical grounds. All the deliberations proved only that there are no grounds to recognize this immortality as substantially revealed; however they did not prove directly that it has not been revealed. Therefore, there still remains an open possibility that the Magisterium — led by the Holy Spirit — will find in the Revelation some other grounds for explaining *ad explicandam fidem* that it has been substantially revealed. Until the Magisterium of the Church provides such an explanation of the Revelation, the theologians may withdraw bodily immortality from the theological interpretation of the state of the original justice, on the condition that they leave the final decision to the Church.” Ignacy Różycki, “Nowa interpretacja dogmatu *in sensu recto*: zagadnienie nieśmiertelności w stanie sprawiedliwości pierwotnej,” [The new interpretation of the dogma *in sensu recto*: the problem of immortality in the state of the original justice] *Analecta Cracoviensia* 5 (1973): p. 504.

inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50; cf. 1 Cor 15:35–50). To ascend to God, one must abandon limited and short-sighted human existence. This limitation does not mean an ontic imperfection of bodily matter compared to the higher form of spiritual existence. Such a belief would only be a form of Platonism and idealism — always attractive temptations to those who overlook the reality of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery. The limitation and imperfection mentioned above concern an earthly stage of our life, which St. Paul expresses in the following words:

For we know partially and we prophesy partially; but the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. (1 Cor 13:9–12)

To see God “face to face,” we must die (cf. Ex 30:20). First, we must die to ourselves in the earthly reality of ordinary, everyday life that when the day of passage (Passover) comes, it can truly be a *dies natalis*, a day of birth to life in God.

God, Who is Love (*see* 1 Jn 4:16), is the mystery of dying and death for self. That is why the most perfect sign and deepest expression of the inner life of the Only God is Christ’s death on the Cross.

God, Who is essentially and totally the Father begetting the Son, begets Him, dying to His own “I.” To such an extent to which He exists (and His existence is infinite), He comes forward to the Son and thus infinitely begets Him as the eternal Word, the infinite and only Son. Aware of the limitations of human language, we can only say that the Father dies to Himself, as if to make space for the Son in His Divine nature. The Son responds to the Father’s love by sacrificing Himself, as manifested on the Cross. Moreover, by being offered to God by people created through the mystery of the Father’s begetting the Son in His own image, the Son fulfills the Father’s eternal plan to gather into one the scattered children of God (cf. Jn 11:52) and become their Head and their Beginning (cf. Col 1:18). The creation and redemption of man are thus closely connected as the revelation of the inner life of God.

3.2 Christ, the Son of God, “the Image of the Invisible God” (Col 1:15)

Jesus of Nazareth, “delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:23–24). Such a *kerygma* — the Paschal message of the early Jerusalem Church — was proclaimed by St. Peter on the day of Pentecost. This message was initially addressed to the Jews, who believed they were the sole beneficiaries of the promise given to Abraham. It was then extended to all others who have been called “Gentiles” (*gentes*) or pagans by the heirs of the promise. Because Peter quickly became convinced that God has no favorites, but that anyone of any nation who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him (cf. Acts 10:34–35). In spreading the Gospel about Christ, the Crucified Son of God, the Apostle Paul highlights that Christ is a stumbling block and a scandal to the Jews, who demand signs and miracles from God, and foolishness and an absurdity to the Gentiles who seek only human wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 1:23). However, this Crucified Jesus, rejected by the Jews and despised by the Gentiles, God made the Lord and the Messiah — Christ (cf. Acts 2:36) — by raising Him from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 1:1). The Crucified and Risen Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).

Years ago, during my missionary work in Rwanda, a French nun participating in a Lenten retreat preached about the Crucified Christ asked me a question which still bothers me, a question of all Christians striving to deepen their understanding of the Faith. How is it possible that God, Who is love, let His Son die, particularly on the Cross? Couldn’t the Father save Him from human malice and a disgraceful death? Couldn’t He find a painless way to save man and the world? The answer is no. God could not have saved man other than through the Cross of Christ. Moreover, God the Father not only let His Son die on the Cross but even desired it from Him, because He is God Who is Love. The essence of Love, which is God, consists of dying to self in order to give life to others. The sin that entered the world through the envy of the Devil, which consists in not believing and trusting in God, makes such love seem senseless and absurd. But the most important message of Christ, Who as the only One exists “at the Father’s side” (cf. Jn 1:18) and truly reveals Him to the world

as the only One, reads: “whoever wishes to save his life will lose it” and “whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life” (Lk 9:24; Jn 12:25).

Christ’s death on the Cross is not a punishment for sin that He takes upon Himself as a substitute for sinners, nor is it a means of appeasing God’s wrath for our sins. These are secondary meanings of the sacrifice. Christ’s death on the Cross is primarily a revelation of the Triune God’s identity and the expression of His boundless love for mankind. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends,” says Jesus, immediately adding, “You are my friends, if you do what I command you” (Jn 15:13–14). Jesus presented His disciples with a divine pattern: a man must lose his life in this world to save it for eternity and rise from the dead. The only way to live is through death. Surrendering your life and dying to self is accomplished by taking up your cross and following Christ Himself (cf. Mk 8:34–35; Jn 12:25), Who “cannot do anything on his own; but only what he sees his father doing: for whatever he does, the son will do also” (Jn 5:19).

We can sense here the meaning of St. Paul’s statement about the Crucified Christ, Who is an absurd scandal for people desiring to understand the mystery of God but seeing it from a human perspective only. Myself, with its accompanying baggage of sins and problems that I desire to be freed from, is not the starting point for encountering God and accepting Him, as revealed in the Crucified and Risen Christ. Instead, the start and endpoint is the Cross of Christ, which reveals the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For those called to be a witness of this mystery, whether Jews or Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor 1:24), the Cross is the tree of knowledge from which they learn that God is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8) and that love feeds on sacrifice, thus covering many sins (cf. 1 Pet 4:8).

Therefore, out of love Christ willingly chose to die on the Cross. On the Cross, He demonstrates that love which is the identity of God and His gift to us, thus revealing the mystery of the inner life of the Trinity. The sin of man nailed Him to the Cross, but the death of Christ involved much more than removing sin. It reveals the mystery of the Father’s eternal begetting of the Son and the Son’s consent to exist only and exclusively according to the Father’s will: “My Father, ... not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39). The Epistle to the Hebrews and the pre-Pauline hymn from the Epistle to the Philippians call this mystery of the Son’s consent to the Father’s will *obedience* (cf. Heb 5:5–9; 10:5–7; Phil 2:6–11). Such obedi-

ence brings death to self, a self-death that Christ learns from His Father, so He can say: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

What Jesus is like in His death in which He accepts not to be more and not to live more than just through His Father who has begotten Him, such is the Word in His eternal sonship. The Father exists in His fatherhood. The Son exists in His relying towards the Father from whom He receives Himself.¹⁹

Because the Father and the Son are a gift to each other, They are Love. They give each other everything They have and Their very existence. They celebrate the endless and eternal mystery of sacrificing Themselves up to death, a mystery which is manifested in Christ's death on the Cross. For anyone without the gift of the Christian faith, this death seems a painful and unnecessary scandal, a tragic end of a great miracle worker, a friend of publicans and sinners, or maybe a hopeless dreamer. But the truth about Jesus is different. He is not Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist or one of the great prophets. He is not on par with Buddha, Muhammad, or any other founder of a religious movement. Jesus is the Messiah — Christ — the Son of God Who was to come to the world (cf. Mt 16:13–16). Because of this, it was necessary for Him to suffer on the Cross and, through death, enter into His glory (cf. Lk 24:26). By doing so, He restored the original meaning of natural death as a gateway to eternity and immortality for mankind in accordance with God's creation of man. Those who believed and trusted Christ were freed from Satan's slavery. This slavery had held them captive through the fear of death (cf. Heb 2:15) and made them capable of killing others to defend themselves, to gain something, or to prove their superiority and strength (cf. Gen 4:1–16). Those who do not believe still act according to the way described in the Book of Wisdom long before the Word became the Flesh:

Let us oppress the righteous poor; let us neither spare the widow, nor revere the aged for hair grown white with time. But let our strength be our norm of righteousness, for weakness proves itself useless. Let us lie in wait for the righteous one, because he is annoying to us; he opposes our actions, Reproaches us for transgressions of the law, and charges us with violations of our

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

training. He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the Lord. To us he is the censure of our thoughts, merely to see him is a hardship for us; Because his life is not like that of others, and different are his ways. He judges us debased; he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure. He calls blest the destiny of the righteous and boasts of that God is his Father. Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him in the end. For if the righteous one is the son of God's, God will help him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. With violence and torture, let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words God will take care of him. (Wis 2:10–20)

The Only Righteous One, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has also been saved but contrary to human logic.

In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and with tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Heb 5:7–9)

God the Father allowed His Only Son die, but not in the same way as those who wanted His annihilation did. The Father permitted His Messiah to suffer because in His death on the Cross He revealed the eternal mystery of begetting the Son in the power of His Spirit. “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (Heb 5:5). Through the Resurrection, God begot His Son in Christ's act of dying on the Cross and thus entrusting Himself totally to the Father. This mystery of the inner life of God, in which man is included through the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, that is His death and Resurrection, is also the mystery of our salvation.

3.3 The Spirit of the Father and the Son

The death and Resurrection of Christ, as one indivisible mystery of our salvation, occurred through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son. In a way, the Holy Spirit also defines the mystery

of God. For God is the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:17). Therefore if God's love is poured into the hearts of the faithful by the Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), this means that the Holy Spirit is God's love. It is the endless love which manifests Itself in total self-death. Without even a personal name ("spirit" means a breeze or breath), It exists as God's unending humility, essentially a death to self. That is why the Spirit gives life and, from the beginning, enlivens whatever exists. He is the Spirit of the Father in His fatherhood towards the Son, His creative power in relation to the creation, and the Spirit of the Son in His submission and obedience to the Eternal Father.

God is the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Son is begotten in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both. The law of the Spirit guides both. They are characterized by the same Spirit in which they are the Father and the Son. This mystery of death and life, in which the Holy Spirit is present and which reveals the full glory of Christ's death, dwells in them.²⁰

The death of Christ is His praise and glory. Through His death, Christ reveals that God is Love. Saint John the Evangelist, called "the Theologian" in the tradition of the Eastern Church, wrote in his Gospel:

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink! Whoever believes in me, as scripture says, 'Rivers of living water shall flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. (Jn 7:37–39)

The glory of Jesus is manifested in His Passover, where He, as the begotten Son of the Father, working in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35), leads to the fullness of the mystery of His eternal, filial begetting through His Resurrection by the power of the Spirit. In the Paschal Christ, death and Resurrection become one indivisible mystery through the power of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the Incarnation and the Passover are the revelations of the inner life of God — also by the power of the Spirit of the Father and the Son. Jesus is born into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit because the Archangel says to

²⁰ Ibid., p. 134.

Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). He is “established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through Resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4). God the Father resurrected His Son in the Spirit. In the eternal, trinitarian mystery, God the Father begets His Son in the omnipotence of love — the Holy Spirit, *the womb of God* — and in His deepest identity. The Theologian refers to the Spirit as the Name of God in his first epistle (cf. 1 Jn 4:8). Therefore, since God is love, He sacrifices Himself through the power of His Spirit. We can say that God acts in accordance with His nature, which the Holy Spirit expresses.

The Father comes out of himself in his fatherhood full of love. The Son is heading towards the Father in his sonship full of love. It can be said about both that they are offered as a sacrifice. Its love is the Holy Spirit. “There are Three of Them: The Loving, The Loved, and Love.” There are three of them: the sacrificed Father, the sacrificed Son, and the Spirit, who is the sacrificial action. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the burnt offering whose fire is the Spirit.²¹

It is difficult not to reference the episode from Genesis, scandalous for many, in which God demanded from Abraham the sacrifice of his son on Mount Moriah (cf. Gen 22:1–19). God, Who called Abraham to be a father of God’s people, permits him, through this personal experience, to discover the heart of the mystery of His Divine fatherhood: that of sacrificing Himself in His Son. Thus, the first unveiling of this mystery is discovered even in the Old Testament but is fully revealed and clarified only in the Crucified and Risen Christ, Who lives forever in the mystery of His death. The Eucharist always celebrated by the Church in memory of the New and Eternal Covenant, is firstly the sacramental presence and access to this mystery of Divine life. Therefore, the *Sign of the Cross and the broken bread* lead the faithful to encounter the living God, Who is Love. Through real communion with Himself, God enables the faithful to fully unite with Him on the day of death — the day of new birth, which Christians have always called *dies natalis* or “birth into heaven.” Before a man baptized and immersed in the death of Christ can be born anew, he must learn to live according to the Spirit, rejecting a purely *human way* of life, what the New Testament calls *living according to the flesh*.

²¹ Ibid., p. 134.

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. (Gal 5:19–25)

Being guided by the Spirit, Whom St. Paul references, means becoming “sons in the Son” until He is fully formed in us, because He, the Son as the Eternal Word of the Father, Himself learned obedience by what He had suffered. He, as Man, entered the path of becoming the Son, which He had been through being eternally begotten.

CHAPTER 2

Mary as the Immaculate Conception in Light of the Theology of the Paschal Mystery

Jesus has been the Son since the very *beginning*. Although always the Son, the Father continuously begot Him throughout His earthly life, which, full of love, consisted of *obedience* and *acceptance* in order to *become the Son* according to the eternal plan of the Father (cf. Heb 5:8–10). Becoming the Son while simultaneously being begotten by the Father in the Holy Spirit reached its fullness for Jesus in His death on the Cross and in the Resurrection, what we call the Passover. The Passover and the Incarnation of the Word are inseparable, just as the creation and the salvation of man are.²² Therefore, as it is inconceivable to contemplate the Incarnation of Logos without acknowledging the active involvement of Mary, the Mother of the Word, it is equally incomprehensible to comprehend the true meaning of the Lord's Passover without acknowledging the substantial presence of His Mother, who was present at the Cross on Calvary and in the Cenacle, where she gathered with the disciples awaiting the descent of the Spirit of Truth. However, at the same time, it is impossible to grasp the theological figure of Mary without considering her in the light of Passover. For she is also an integral part of the mystery of *becoming a son or daughter in the Son*, which originates and culminates in Christ's Paschal victory. Although it occurred at a specific time and place, this victory is a cosmic event transcending the boundaries of time and space.²³

The Gospel of St. Luke testifies that, during the Annunciation, the Virgin of Nazareth was already "full of grace" (Lk 1:28). She had been inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit, Who enabled her to willingly and freely accept the Word, and to deliver Him to the world as both true God and true Man. Although already the Mother of God, she has never ceased to become more so a Mother. Moreover, for her, as in the case of

²² Cf. Benedict XVI, "Eucharistic Celebration 21.08.2001", in *God's Revolution*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).

²³ See Anna Murawska, "Kosmiczny wymiar pełni zbawienia w Chrystusie Paschalnym w ujęciu ks. Wacława Hryniewicza," [A cosmic dimension of the fullness of salvation in the Paschal Christ according to Fr. Wacław Hryniewicz] *Teologia w Polsce* 9, no. 2 (2015): p. 131–147.

the Son, the culmination and simultaneously the new beginning of this process of becoming a Mother was the Paschal mystery of Christ. While exalted on the Cross, the Son declared Mary, the Woman of the Beginning and the End of salvation history (cf. Gen 3:15; Rev 12), the Mother of His children (cf. Heb 2:10–18; Jn 19:27).

Mary's mystery of *becoming the Mother* is intertwined and adequately conditioned by the unique gift of the "fullness of grace." This gift created an intense relationship between the Virgin of Nazareth and the Triune God, filling her heart to the extent that there was no room left for her to seek her own happiness apart from God. Every sin ultimately is seeking happiness without God, particularly Adam's personal tragedy, which burdens the entire history of mankind as the *original sin*. The Church professes and venerates the mystery of Mary's extraordinary redemption, calling it the Immaculate Conception. This mystery does not only regard the chronological beginning of the life of Jesus' Mother, as if separated from her person and her history which are forever united to her Son, nor does it only consist in freedom from the original sin. It consists in her *salvific relationship* with the Triune God, the *personal identity* to which Mary herself referred to in Lourdes when, on March 25, 1858, she said, "I am the Immaculate Conception."²⁴

1. The Need for Interpretation of the Dogma

For a long time, theological reflections of Western Christianity have primarily focused on the apologetic rather than soteriological aspect of Christ's Resurrection. Additionally, the truths of faith were expressed using juridical language. This inevitably influenced other branches of theology, including Mariology, undoubtedly contributing to the final formulation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. This dogma is a summary of Catholic doctrine about salvation, and its external form reflects how this truth was communicated at the times it was formulated. The dogmatic definition promulgated on December 8, 1854, by Blessed Pius IX in a bull *Ineffabilis Deus* is saturated with juridical terminology (grace, privilege, merit),²⁵ an inheritance of the

²⁴ See Jacques Perrier ed. *Je suis l'Immaculée Conception, Colloque organisée par les sanctuaires Notre-Dame de Lourdes et la Société Française d'Études mariales*, (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2006); Jean-Marie Hennaux, "La formule de Lourdes: 'Je suis l'Immaculée Conception,'" *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 130 (2008): p. 65–78.

²⁵ "For the honor of the Holy and undivided Trinity, for the glory and adornment of the Virgin Mother of God, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith, and for the furtherance of the Catholic

era dominated by a juridical theology. Therefore, it requires an interpretation that will help a man of our time, who believes in Christ and tries to grasp the Church's deposit of faith. Pope St. John XXIII spoke about this in his speech which opened the Second Vatican Council, which encouraged searching for new ways of expressing the essence of dogmatic truths without compromising their deep, unalterable sense.²⁶ Past controversies regarding the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception mainly arose from a chronological rather than theological understanding of this mystery, such as how Mary could have been redeemed before the coming of the Redeemer. These controversies stem from the inadequacy of the terms used by juridical theology to express this truth. Focusing on a negative aspect of the reality of the Immaculate Conception (preserving Mary from original sin at the moment of her conception), more significant positive aspects of the truth — the fullness of grace, the sanctifying presence and work of the Holy Spirit in whom Mary becomes a *new creation*, the *New Eve*, the Immaculate Conception — were pushed to the background as if forgotten. Looking, perhaps in a *human perspective* only at the Cross and suffering of Christ, theologians forgot that salvation is not just an act of offering made by Jesus once and forever in the historical past, whose merits can be *applied* to people through the mediation of the Church. Ultimately, salvation is a *permanent* and *eschatological* reality that exists in Christ, Who, having risen, continuously lives to intercede for those who approach God through Him (cf. Heb 7:25). Therefore, a personal relationship with God and, through Him, with others, is of the utmost importance. Salvation is not an abstract application of graces and Christ's merits, as if they existed in a *heavenly treasury* held by the Church, but the real presence of the Resurrected, Who lives in His Church and gives life to the world.

Viewed through this understanding of salvation, Mary's Immaculate Conception signifies not only her freedom from the sin of Adam at the moment of her conception through the future merits of Christ, but firstly

religion, by the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own: "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful" (Pius IX, dogmatic bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*, December 8, 1854, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>). The original text of the above fragment is in *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta, Pars prima: acta exhibens quae ad ecclesiam universam spectant*, (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1971), p. 616.

²⁶ See John XXIII, "Discorso di apertura del Concilio ecumenico Vaticano II," October, 11, 1962, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962): p. 792.

her immersion in the permanent and eschatological reality of salvation, which exists in her Son — the Holy Spirit, the eternal and uncreated Immaculate Conception. This Spirit, the Creator and Sanctifier, comes when the Son is glorified (Jn 7:39) through His death and Resurrection.

1.1 The Immaculate Conception – the Paschal Identity of Mary

The Paschal mystery of the Son of God, especially His Resurrection, is not an isolated event. It directly affects every man in the world, particularly Mary, about whom we learn through the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. In Paschal theology, which does not separate the mysteries of creation and redemption, the Paschal Victim, Jesus Christ, is the transcendent and eschatic Son of God, before everything and in Whom everything exists. He is the Head of the Body, the Church, and the Beginning, the firstborn to any creature (cf. Col 1:15–18). Thus, in theological categories, Christ is also Mary's First-Born, who became His Mother for us and our salvation. In becoming the Mother of the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35), Mary also received a new name: the Full of Grace (Greek *kécharitôménè*). This new name bears witness to her Paschal identity, defined by the Church in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and confirmed by herself in Lourdes in 1858.

One day, the Church, through the mouth of the parish priest of Lourdes, asked Mary to disclose her name. The beautiful lady that appeared devoted herself to prayer for weeks. To reveal her name, she waited for the day from which she drew her name, the day of the holy conception. On the morning of the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1858, she appeared, "small and young" as when she was betrothed and no longer delayed her reply. Opening her hands that had been joined together, lowering her arms, then raising them, resplendent with gratitude, she said, "I am the Immaculate Conception." Bernadette went to the parish priest and told him, "She answered: 'I am the Immaculate Conception.'" Mary does not merely call herself immaculate in her conception, exempt from the stain of the original sin. Of course, she affirms this, but she also indicates something infinitely greater. Her *unique grace, not shared* with anyone, her eternal identity, the name that characterizes her, is not to be found in exemption from Adam's sin. God could have protected other creatures from the moment of their creation from the evil which from the beginning has spread over the world (Rom 5:12). Moreover, every Christian is freed

from original sin by Baptism, which raises him or her up, beyond the sinner Adam, to the point of the divine sonship of Christ, Who “is before all things” (Col 1:17). The Immaculate Conception is a grace more radical than being born exempt from “the stain of the sin of Adam.” Again, no human being is a radical sinner, as God does not create sinners. In the heart, man is created in Christ and directed towards Christ (Col 1:15–16): sin appears superficially, on the surface of this inner reality, seeking to contradict the covenant of fatherhood and sonship which through creation God has established between Himself and His creatures. At his creation, man is not immersed in sin but in an original grace, because before being dependent on Adam, he is created by God in His Christ and for His Christ.²⁷

It is not a question of denying the truth of the universality of the original sin, nor about minimizing its significance. The sin of Adam is visible in every person. Because of it, man disregards, or even destroys, his *original identity* as God’s child, created in the image of God, in Christ and for Christ. However, the grace of man’s creation and adoption to sonship in Christ Jesus is the fundamental principle and most profound truth about himself — not sin. Grace always comes first. The gift of the Creator Spirit, Who in the act of creation was “sweeping over the waters” is *original*, not sin (Gen 1:2). Mary, who calls herself the Immaculate Conception in Lourdes, becomes the face and icon of the Spirit. Mary’s Immaculate Conception is the sign of the mystery of the Holy Spirit’s presence and influence in humanity and the world, despite the existence of sin. We must not forget that “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Rom 5:20), the grace of the presence of the Spirit of God, Who is Love — and love covers a multitude of sins.

2. The Gift of the Fullness of the Spirit

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* calls Mary “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (53), thus expressing the extraordinary *relationship* and *union* of Christ’s Mother with the Holy Spirit, in Whom the Father eternally begets the Son.

Teaching about the mystery of the Holy Trinity, St. Augustine said that the Father is the One Who Loves, the Son is Loved, and the Spirit is

²⁷ François-Xavier Durrwell, *Mary, Icon of the Spirit and of the Church* (St. Paul Publications, 1990), p. 26–27.

Love.²⁸ In a paraphrase of a great Father of the Church, on the day of his arrest by the Gestapo, St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, a holy Polish martyr from Auschwitz and lover of the Immaculata wrote that the Father is the one Who eternally begets the Son, the Son is eternally begotten, and the Spirit is the fruit of Divine love — an uncreated Immaculate Conception.²⁹ The Paschal theology of François-Xavier Durrwell, building upon the insights of St. Maximilian and St. Augustine goes even further, observing the Holy Spirit as *the principle of God's life*, which is *a self-denial (death for yourself)*. The Spirit is viewed as the power of Divine conception and begetting, the very *womb of God* in which the Father eternally begets the Son, dying to Himself. In turn, the Son, through His own obedience which is a death to Himself, opens himself to the Father's life-giving action, thus becoming the source of eternal salvation for those who come to Him through faith in the Gospel and obedience to God revealed in Christ as the Son of God (cf. Heb 2:5–18). The culmination of the revelation of the Holy Spirit's identity — the revelation of life through self-death, and, above all, the revelation of God as the Father and Christ as the Eternal Son of God — is the mystery of Resurrection.³⁰ This mystery is inseparably bound with the mystery of the incarnation of the Word, through which, when “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) comes, the fullness of deity will dwell among His people in bodily form (cf. Col 2:9).

These two crucial Christological events reveal the great mystery of the eschatological salvific reality occurring in our human condition of

²⁸ See St. Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, VIII, 14, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

²⁹ Cf. St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, *Wybór pism* [Selected writings], in *Akademia Teologii Katolickiej*, ed. J. Bar, Warszawa, ATK 1973, p. 370, 597–598. A concise presentation of St. Maximilian Kolbe's reflections on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception can be found in Grzegorz Bartosik, *Duch Święty a pośrednictwo Matki Bożej według świętego Maksymiliana M. Kolbego* [The Holy Spirit and mediation of the Mother of God according to St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe], accessed March 9, 2020, <http://ptm.rel.pl/czytelnia/artykuly/44-duch-swietego-maksymiliana-m-kolbego.html>.

³⁰ “[T]he Spirit fulfills its role of divine begetting conspicuously at the point where the mystery of God is fully accomplished in this world, in Jesus' Passover. At this culmination of his human existence, Christ attains the fullness of his own birth as Son. ‘What God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus: as also it is written in the second psalm, “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee”’ (Acts 13:32–33); the Son was ‘designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead’ (Rom 1:4). It is in the power, it is in the glory, it is in the Spirit, who is the divine begetting, that God has raised him up. Ever since, the Church has known with certainty that God is the Father, that Jesus is his only Son, and theology is able to conclude that the Spirit is the divine begetting or, to put it in the feminine, is the divine conception, the Spirit who is the power in which the Father raises up his Christ.” François-Xavier Durrwell, *Mary, the Icon of the Spirit and of the Church*, p. 17–18, cf. Durrwell, *Christ Our Passover*.

time and space through God entering the history of man and the world, with all the richness of His inner life, revealing Himself as the Only God, existing as the Community of Persons through love. Thus love, which is death of self, is the principle of existence of the Triune God, Who is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16), and of every creature truly living if they remain in love. The Only God is not alone and “single.” By the power and grace of His Spirit, God eternally begets His Son and creates everything through Him. The Son responds to the love of the Father with obedience and gives life to the world by fulfilling God’s will through His death and Resurrection.

Mary, who introduced herself as the Immaculate Conception in Lourdes, *fully* — freely, unconditionally, and with complete devotion — participates in this salvific mystery of God’s begetting the Son in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. “The Father of mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by the acceptance of her who was predestined to be the mother of his Son.”³¹ This eternal predestination of Mary to be the Mother of the Word does not only involve keeping her from the original sin. In fact, freedom from Adam’s fault does not yet mean the “fullness” with which the Virgin of Nazareth is blessed, because this freedom results from the *fulfulness of grace*, and not vice versa. The *unique privilege* of Mary does not lie solely in her sinlessness but in her *full* participation in the *fulness* of God’s life and in *fulfilling*, in imitation of Christ, righteousness (cf. Mt 3:15; Heb 10:7). The ineffable gift of “fullness of grace” (Lk 1:26), thus, involves Mary’s great freedom from self, and complete union with the Holy Spirit, to the extent that the Virgin of Nazareth becomes as if His *face* and *icon*.

Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe does not hesitate to present Mary’s relationship with the Third Person of the Holy Trinity in terms of quasi-incarnation.³² The Holy Spirit, Who Divine humility does not even have a personal name, is called *God’s power* and *glory* in Scripture (see Ex 16:7; Jn 2:11; Jn 11:40). His sanctifying action is symbolized by *a cloud* surrounding the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple on the day of its dedication; *a dove* flying over Jesus during His Baptism in the Jordan River; *a gust of wind* and *tongues of fire* on Pentecost; and finally *water* of the new creation and a new birth. This Spirit, Who originates from the Father and bears

³¹ The Second Vatican Council, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, No. 56.

³² See Bartosik, *Duch Święty a pośrednictwo Matki Bożej według świętego Maksymiliana M. Kolbego* [The Holy Spirit and mediation of the Mother of God according to St. Maximilian M. Kolbe], note 27.

witness to Christ (*see* Jn 15:26), fills Mary with His presence (*shekhinah*) from the first moment of her existence that to the degree that if He, the Holy Spirit, can be called “the uncreated Immaculate Conception” then Mary, his Temple, becomes “the created Immaculate Conception.” All this occurred “for us and for our salvation,” that when “the fullness of time” came (cf. Gal 4:4), Mary, as the Immaculate Conception, could become in our human reality a humble womb of God. She undertook the Spirit’s role in the mystery of the immanent Trinity. Durrwell even calls her “the human understudy of the Holy Spirit,”³³ because in her the eternal fatherhood of God, i.e. begetting the Son by the Father in the Holy Spirit, is accomplished “for us and for our salvation” in the world which God loved so much that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life (cf. Jn 3:16).

Therefore, the mystery of the Annunciation, as described by St. Luke in his Gospel (*see* Lk 1:26–38), reveals the profound and inseparable union between Mary, the Daughter of Zion, and the Holy Spirit. Their union and unity reflect the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, where the Father begets the Son and reveals that the essence of God’s inner life also happens in the world. Modern theology introduces here the distinction between the immanent Trinity, i.e. the Trinity as such, and the economic Trinity, i.e. the Trinity for us and for our salvation which manifests itself in the *mission* of the Divine Persons: the Father *sends* the Son and the Spirit, but is not sent Himself; the Son is *sent* and also *sends* the Spirit; the Spirit is *sent* by the Father and the Son but does not send anyone Himself. Thus, as the Immaculate Conception and the Mother of the Incarnate Word, Mary participates *fully* in the *mission* of the Spirit and the Son, serving the mystery of the revelation of God’s love.

Thus, just as the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters in the Beginning (*see* Gen 1:1–2), when God created everything through His Word, in Christ and for Christ (cf. Jn 1:3; Col 1:16–17), the same Spirit came upon Mary, who, already filled with His presence, was therefore capable of being called *Full of Grace*. The power of the Most High, the Spirit Himself, overshadowed her with His cloud (*see* Lk 1:35), that, as the Bride, the Daughter of Zion, and the humble Handmaid of the Lord, she could say, “Come” (Rev 22:17), like the Spirit himself, and “*Fiat mihi secundum Verbum Tuum*” (cf. Lk 1:38). That is why in number 56 of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, we read, “Thus Mary, a daughter

³³ Durrwell, *Mary, the Icon of the Spirit and of the Church*, p. 21.

of Adam, consenting to the divine Word, became the mother of Jesus, the one and only Mediator. Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son." Mary's union with and self-dedication to the *person* and *work* of the Son are not only because of her human motherly love. Rather, they are the mysterious "fullness of grace" (Lk 1:28), which is the Holy Spirit filling the heart of the Virgin Mother and enabling her to die to herself. This death of self means selfless and genuine love. Through the Spirit Jesus was conceived in her womb and born into a humble life. This Spirit watched over Christ throughout His whole earthly life, showing Him His "motherly love"³⁴ through the faithful presence and

³⁴ "Calling the Holy Spirit the Mother and assigning motherly features to him appears for the first time in the 3rd and 4th centuries, as documented by Yves Congar in his trilogy *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. However, Methodius of Philippi (also known as Methodius of Olympus), who died around 312 CE, was the first theologian to offer an original justification of this thesis. He interpreted the creation of Eve in the context of Christ and the Church, drawing on ancient Christian tradition. ... Further development of this idea, i.e. attributing female and motherly features to the Holy Spirit in the inner life of the immanent Trinity, was prompted by theological discourse in response to the Pneumatomachian heresy in the second half of the 4th century. The Fathers of the Church, seeking the most appropriate way of explaining the second origin in the Trinity, referred to the analogy between the origins of the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity and the origin of the first people on earth, who were created 'in the image and likeness of God.' ... Yves Congar quotes several modern theologians who notice motherly features of the Holy Spirit in the immanent Trinity. A. Lamonnier says: 'Out of all the Divine Persons, he [the Holy Spirit] is the one who in a more special way has been "given" to us. He is *God's Gift* par excellence and that is where he takes his name from. In the Trinity, he is *Love*; it is also one of his proper names. But those names suit a mother more than anyone else, and in a way they describe a mother. Nobody on earth is "given" to us as our mother [is], and she embodies love in what is most selfless, generous, and devoted in her.' Other theologians also emphasize that the fact that the Holy Spirit is the personal love of the Father and the Son makes female features more visible in him than in the Father and the Son. ... An interesting interpretation of the inner life of the Trinity was presented by François-Xavier Durrwell. He calls the Holy Spirit 'Person-Love,' in which the Father begets the Son. Thus the Third Divine Person is, as if from nature, credited with motherly features. Building on the typology of Methodius of Olympus and the Cappadocian Fathers, who saw in Adam and Eve a type of the Holy Spirit with respect to their origin within the Trinity, modern theologians have increasingly recognized that female characteristics, particularly those of a mother, accurately describe the Person and work of the Third Divine Person in the immanent Trinity. He is a uniting love of the Father and the Son; he is their mutual gift; he is the response of the Son to the love of the Father; he is Person-Love in which the Father begets the Son. All those descriptions are features characterizing primarily a woman, especially a mother. ... Modern theologians also increasingly recognize motherly characteristics in the economic Trinity. It is most of all about the involvement of the Holy Spirit in realization of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Of course, we cannot describe the Holy Spirit as the Mother giving birth to the Son and build an analogy in relation to a human family: God the Father and 'God Mother — the Holy Spirit' give birth to God the Son. Saint Thomas already called it an absurdity. Nevertheless, it is worth paying attention to those opinions of modern theologians which notice motherly features of the Holy Spirit in His contribution to the mystery of the Incarnation. Yves Congar, who writes about it most explicitly, sees three 'motherly involvements of the Third Divine Person' in the Son's mission in the economy of salvation: 'The Spirit realizes "in a motherly way" the Father's plan on the

devotion of the Mother, who from the beginning had been to the Son the face and the icon of the Spirit. Finally, in the Son of Man's crucial moment of exaltation on the Cross (see Jn 3:14–15), when He prayed and entreated, with loud cries and tears, the One who had the power to save Him from death (see Heb 5:17) and when dying cried out, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), this Spirit revealed the power and glory of the Father. Through the Spirit, the Giver of life, the Father raised Christ from the dead and placed Him at His right hand saying: "You are my son: today I have begotten you" (cf. Heb 5:5; Acts 13:33).

Also, the Mother, the Immaculate Conception, was standing by the Cross of Jesus (see Jn 19:25), becoming, in the Holy Spirit (whose mystical temple, face, and icon she was) the Mother of the Church — the Mystical Body of Christ, her Son. In this Body, the Son of God is always present as the Paschal Lamb, slaughtered but resurrected and eternally living in the mystery of His death through the power of the Spirit, the Giver of life.

3. The New Eve, "The Daughter of Her Son"

Mary's participation in the Holy Spirit's mission in the world, revealed in the words "I am the Immaculate Conception," is directed to Christ and the Church because Mary, filled with the grace of the Spirit, remains fully devoted to the Son and His work. She lives *pro Christo et Ecclesia*. It cannot be otherwise, because the Spirit is sent to glorify Christ (see Jn 16:14). The glory of Christ is revealed through the Church and the person who embodies and reflects it mystically, serving as both a model

verge of the new creation: in the birth of the Word-Son in human nature, in his messianic role (the dove flies over Jesus when the voice of the Father says: "You are my Son"), in his new birth through the Resurrection and glorification, in the situation of humanity of the Son of God.' This short statement of the French Dominican clearly suggests that in his opinion the Holy Spirit in a motherly manner 'cares' for the Son in time of his earthly life: he not only participates in his conception but also takes care of his completing fully the messianic mission. We can see here a clear similarity of Congar's concept with the concept of 'trinitarian inversion' proposed by Balthasar, according to which during the earthly life of Jesus the Holy Spirit unites him with the Father, passes the Father's will to him and strengthen the Son to fulfill the mission up to the end. Henry Manteau-Bonamy calls the Holy Spirit, in the context of the mystery of the Incarnation, the Uncreated Maternal Love which comes to Mary to realize in her the conception of the Son of God. This motherhood of the Holy Spirit is best fulfilled through Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation. Mary accepts and fulfills this maternal role of the Spirit and becomes the Mother of the Son of God. Moreover, Durrwell believes that the Holy Spirit performs a maternal function in relation to Jesus, also during his earthly life, because he raises and guides Jesus which is a typical maternal role." Grzegorz Bartosik, "Macierzyństwo duchowe Maryi w macierzyństwie Ducha Świętego" [Spiritual motherhood of Mary in motherhood of the Holy Spirit], *Salvatoris Mater* 10, no. 2 (2008): p. 74–78.

and a mirror. Thus, there is a close link between the dogmatic definition of 1854 and Mary's words in Lourdes on March 25, 1858. They charismatically confirm the dogma of faith, solemnly declared by the Church only four years earlier through the Petrine ministry of Blessed Pius IX, and acknowledge it on a theological level. While the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* emphasizes mainly the Christological dimension of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, redeemed *intuitu meritorum Christi*, a personalistic interpretation of the Name of the Beautiful Lady of Lourdes in the light of Paschal theology helps uncover the Holy Spirit's crucial role in the lofty mystery of the redemption of the Mother of the Redeemer, presenting it as her deepest *identity*.

The Church believes that by the power of the *foreseen merits* of Christ, the Paschal Lamb, Mary was conceived without the stain of Adam's sin. The words Mary spoke in Lourdes confirm this faith, but simultaneously reveal more. They illustrate *the unbreakable bond* between the Son who is the Redeemer and the Mother who is redeemed. This bond should be seen in terms of a natural love between a mother and son, which transcends the death of the body, but firstly in the order of grace, as rooted in the Spirit's transcendental holiness in which the Father eternally begets the Son. François-Xavier Durrwell, interpreting the meaning of the words of the Lady of Lourdes, said:

Mary precedes the world's first sin and every other sin: she is "younger than sin, younger than the race from which she has sprung." Born millennia after the first sinner, she is prior to him, much younger than he: she is "the youngest daughter of the human race," "our little youngest sister," she who never reached the age of sin.³⁵

What allowed him to make such a statement? By adopting a theological, rather than positivistic or chronological perspective,³⁶ and considering

³⁵ Durrwell, *Mary, the Icon of the Spirit and of the Church*, p. 33.

³⁶ It is a reference to Joseph Ratzinger's method of theology called "theological" theology (*la teologia "teologica"*) in which the Revelation of the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the starting point of any reflection. According to this concept, God and the realities connected with God are never treated as philosophical abstractions but as a historical and salvific reality (*la realtà storico-salvifica*) accessible to our cognition only in the typological way. About the mystery of Mary's freedom from the original sin, Ratzinger claims that one can understand and define it only through typology. Indeed, it is not about a "positivistic fact," e.g. that Goethe was born on August 28, 1749, but about a reality of a different type. This theological reality can be understood only in the context of chapter 5 of the Epistle to Romans, where St. Paul

the extraordinary communion between Mary and the Son, which the Second Vatican Council described in paragraph 53 of the constitution *Lumen Gentium* as a “close and indissoluble tie,” it becomes clear that Mary’s relationship to Christ as the New Adam extends to her as the New Eve in the order of grace. Of course, this relationship is appropriate and subordinate, based on Mary’s participation in the source of grace to a far greater extent than any other creature. This source of grace is the Paschal Christ, “the life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). That is why we can say:

Jesus, to begin with, precedes our common ancestor, even if he is called “the last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45). He is a descendant, but his origin is in the eternal begetting where he is born of the Father in the holiness of the Spirit: “He is before all things” (Col 1:17). Mary is created in this mystery of the Son, inseparable from him in her original innocence, prior in her motherhood to the sin of her ancestor. When the annunciation came to surprise her, grace had already prepared her for this grace: “Rejoice, you who are full of grace.” To translate it properly one should add this nuance: “You whom grace has made holy, you who have been made pleasing to God.” Right from the beginning she was sanctified with the view to this annunciation. The motherhood of the woman crowned with stars of which the Revelation speaks dates from the origins of mankind. “That ancient serpent,” the one mentioned in Genesis, has always been there before the woman ready to devour the child at his birth (Rev 12:4). There have always been enmities between the pregnant woman and the serpent because of the Messianic seed she is bearing. ... Thus for Mary the innocence of her entry into existence flows from her relationship of motherhood to him whose begetting in the world is the source of all grace.³⁷

But before this motherhood happened as a historical fact, it had already existed in the dimension of God’s “now” exceeding space and time. It was the source of Mary’s sanctification from the first moment of her life.

develops a typology of Christ as the New Adam. Thus the starting point to understanding the original sin is not a historical fact of sin perceived in positivistic categories but freedom from it in the Crucified and resurrected Christ, the salvific reality in the Paschal Christ. For further considerations see Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter of Zion, Meditations on the Church’s Marian Beliefs* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), Antonio Stagliano, *Madre di Dio. La mariologia personalistica di Joseph Ratzinger* (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo, 2010), p. 25–49.

³⁷ Durrwell, *Mary, the Icon of the Spirit and of the Church*, p. 33–35.

Indeed, the Son crushing the snake's head (*see* Gen 3:15), although born of the Woman, does not take His origin from her. "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). He is the Beginning also for the One who with faith accepts Him as the eternal Word of God and becomes His Mother, entirely devoted to Him and His work, the Church. Therefore, the Immaculate Conception is *the Immaculate Beginning of Mary in Christ*, the New Adam.³⁸ In the order of grace, she receives life from the One to whom she has given life by order of nature. For Christ says about Himself that: "Before Abraham came to be, I AM" (Jn 8:58). He is also before Mary, his Mother.

The mystery of the Immaculate Conception is the mystery of supernatural life which the humble servant of the Lord, the New Eve, receives from the One who preceded her as the New Adam. Mary's Beginning is found in the Father's Only Begotten Son, Who, as the eternal Logos, becomes the Son of Mary when "the fullness of time" arrives through the Spirit that fills the Virgin, the true Daughter of Zion. Mary is then so filled with the Spirit that she becomes the Woman of the Beginning and the End, the Virgin Mother of the One who is beyond time as Alpha and Omega. That is why in the context of preparations for the celebration of the Great Jubilee of Redemption, St. John Paul II said about Mary:

In the mystery of Christ, she is present even "before the creation of the world," as the one whom the Father "has chosen" as the Mother of his Son in the Incarnation. And, what is more, together with the Father, the Son has chosen her, entrusting her eternally to the Spirit of holiness. In an entirely special and exceptional way, Mary is united to Christ, and similarly, she is eternally loved in this "beloved Son," this Son who is of one being with the Father, in whom is concentrated all the "glory of grace." At the same time, she is and remains perfectly open to this "gift from above" (cf. Jas. 1:17). As the Council teaches, Mary "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from him." ... Consequently, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, Mary receives life from him to whom she, in the order of earthly generation, gave life as a mother. The liturgy does not

³⁸ See Bogusław Janusz Gil, *Maria, Immacolata e Assunta nell'evento e nella prospettiva del "dono."* *Dimensione culturale e teologica*, (Ariccia: Aracne, 2016), p. 454–457.

hesitate to call her “mother of her Creator” and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of St. Bernard: “daughter of your Son.” And since Mary receives this “new life” with a fullness corresponding to the Son’s love for the Mother, and thus corresponding to the dignity of the divine motherhood, the angel at the Annunciation calls her “full of grace.”³⁹

Therefore, the exceptionalness of Mary’s redemption through the foreseen merits of Jesus Christ does not lie in a *privilege excluding* her from the fate of the rest of mankind as someone without the stain of the original sin but rather in the fullness of the gift of salvific communion with God, in which Mary participates to an incomparably higher degree than any other human being, due to her extraordinary relationship with Christ. Therefore, during the Visitation, St. Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, would exclaim, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42). The absence of original sin and any other sin is the fruit of Mary’s communion with God, which she has never broken due to a lack of faith or trust in her Creator. Elizabeth also emphasizes it saying, “Blessed are you who believed” (Lk 1:45).

Therefore, the Immaculate Conception is Mary’s privilege but a privilege not of exclusivity but *fullness*. Redemption is offered to every man created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26–27), but, unfortunately, not everyone wants to accept it. Mary’s continual close bond with the Son in Whom she was created is a sign that it is possible to live without sin, because original sin is not a *doom* which paralyzes man’s freedom to the extent that he cannot do anything. It is a problem regarding man’s relationship with God, which can be overcome through a living faith in Christ and Baptism (cf. Mk 16:16). This faith requires accepting Christ’s lifestyle and remaining in communion with Him through obedience to His commandments (cf. Jn 14:15–21).

God is not a *creditor* who *applies* Christ’s merits to Mary, because he foresees that His Son will *pay off* the old debt. This legalistic, juridical language fails to fully express the truth about God, revealed in the Old and New Testament as a Merciful Father, Who saves His people through the gift of His Son (cf. Jn 3:16–18), Who “comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (Jn 6:33). By transcending the limitations of juridical thinking and language in theology and embracing the Paschal perspective,

³⁹ Saint John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, March 25, 1987, No. 8 and 10.

believers can discover the truth about the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, which has always been present in divine revelation. In fact, the Church herself did not invent this truth, but discovered it through the inspiration of its Author and solemnly proclaimed it to be believed on December 8, 1854. Mary, as the Immaculate Conception, is in Christ “before the world was created.” She remains in such a close relationship with Him that what we call the original sin never happened to her. She participates as the New Eve in the innocence of the New Adam, from whom she receives life in the order of grace. The dogmatic formula of 1854 speaks more about the degree of Mary’s communion with Christ than the chronology of salvific events, and properly interpreting it requires a theological interpretation rather than a positivistic approach, while avoiding the modernist temptation of historicism⁴⁰ and the traditionalist tendency of mindlessly repeating the pious formulas. In fact, these formulas, while sanctified by the Tradition of the Church, still need to be clarified in order to comfort the heart of the Christian who seeks to understand his Faith (*fides querens intellectum*).

4. The Sign of the Perfection of God’s Creation

According to the Epistle to the Colossians, everything was created *in* and *for* Christ. He is also before everything as the only Savior and Redeemer of mankind through the blood of His Cross (cf. Col 1:15–20). Based on this biblical foundation, Paschal theology, which does not separate the work of creation from redemption, allows for another important discovery regarding the mystery of Mary’s Immaculate Conception: showing the perfection of God’s work of creation, which, despite Adam’s sin, remains entirely successful as “God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good” (Gen 1:31). This perfection is fully manifested in the Virgin Mother, the New Eve, who, as the Immaculate Conception, proclaims the ineffable beauty and kindness of God the Father, the Lover of Life (cf. Wis 11:26), Who creates man in His image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26–27). Presented as “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet” (Rev 12:1), in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, Mary belongs to the original and, in fact, the only plan of God the Creator and Redeemer, Who eternally begets the Son, and thus creates and saves man. Indeed:

⁴⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduzione al Cristianesimo. Lezioni sul Simbolo Apostolico*, (Brescia: Queriniana, 2010), p. 50–61.

[t]he seed of the final creation has already been sown in the first. God is the Father, the essential Father; all his activity is to be found in the begetting of the only Son; he only acts, he only creates in the act in which he is God, in that of his fatherhood with regard to the Son: "all things were created through him and for him." The earth has always been destined to bear in itself the Son and Host of his brethren reunited in him: "All things were created through him and towards him" (Col 1:16).⁴¹

Mary precisely embodies this earth, yet uncontaminated by the sin of unbelief and the guilt of rejecting the Word, Who already existed in the beginning (cf. Jn 1:1). She is a sign of the good soil that receives the seed of the Word⁴² and bears blessed fruit, for that is what she was created for. Finally, she testifies that the eternal Word, the only Begotten Son of the Father, the Redeemer, and the Savior, is necessary for the completion of the earth and all creation, even if Adam had never sinned, because everything was created in Him, and without Him there is no meaning or purpose. However, the proponents of juridical theology and a chronological understanding of God assumed a break between the work of creation and redemption, as if there were a double plan of creation and salvation (plan A and plan B). According to the first plan, people created in a state of original innocence were destined to live in eternal happiness without needing salvation by Christ. Plan B, which concerned the world's salvation, emerges only due to their sin. God sends His Son to save and redeem them. Mary, having an essential role as Mother of the Redeemer, belongs, however, only to the second group, fallen humanity, Adam's offspring, who destroyed God's plan expressed in the creative act. If God had not preserved her from the stain of the original sin, she would have entered history affected by the stain of sin as a daughter of the first Adam. In the light of such a soteriology that emerges from a literal and positivistic interpretation of the salvation events presented in Scripture — often emphasizing the devastating effect of original sin, to the point that even after Baptism, we still struggle with the consequences of our first parents' fault — it seems that there is no other explanation for the mystery of the Immaculate Conception than the idea of preservative redemption

⁴¹ Durrwell, *Mary, the Icon of the Spirit and of the Church*, p. 30.

⁴² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "My Word Shall Not Return to Me Empty!" in Joseph Ratzinger, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 13–18

(*redemptio preservativa*) proposed by the English Franciscan John Duns Scotus in the 14th century.

However, the theology of the Paschal mystery, based on the testimony of the faith of the early Church expressed in John's Gospel and epistles and, most of all, in the Epistle to Colossians and Paul's other epistles, while showing the unity of God's work of creation and redemption, helps to see Mary from a theological, not only positivistic or historical, perspective. The Immaculate Conception is *a theological, not historical, truth* and, as such, not to be perceived in terms of the modern history of facts which can be studied using a *facts-and-figures* method. Mary is the Immaculate Conception because she was created like every human in Christ and for Christ, Who is the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation. However, she does not share the fate of all those who have sinned and are deprived of God's glory (cf. Rom 3:23). In the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, we read, "The Father of mercies willed that" (No. 56) through "a close and indissoluble tie" (No. 53) uniting her with Christ, the New Adam, the perfection of His work of creation, i.e. creating man as *male and female*, (cf. Gen 1:27) should be also revealed in her, the New Eve. In fact, because of the difference of the sexes positively willed by God — expressed in a particular way in the human body requiring *a gift of self* and complementing one another — this creation is *in the image and likeness* of the Creator (cf. Gen 1:26-27).⁴³

⁴³ In the previously mentioned biblical catechesis relating to this key biblical text, Fr. Walde-mar Chrostowski says, "God introducing himself ... lets people know that he is the Only — but he does not exist alone! ... And if God who is the Only does not exist alone, man created in the image of God will not be alone, either. God has not created only one human being, ... but different sexes which are a mysterious image and reflection of the richness of the inner life of God. Just like God, mysteriously is not alone, so man is created not to be alone from the beginning. ... If you open the Millennium Bible [Biblia Tysiąclecia, the main Polish Bible translation used in the liturgy of the Church in Poland, first published in 1965 for the 1000th anniversary of the Baptism of Poland in 966] you will read: 'God created a man and a woman.' It is a bad translation, wrong! We have been trying to correct it for many years — I don't know why it cannot be straightened out. These words should have been translated: 'He created them man and woman.' After all, it was the title of the papal catechesis of John Paul II from 30 years ago about marriage and family: 'Man and woman He created them.' ... What is the difference? ... It says: *zakar uneqebah bara otam*. We translate: 'Man and woman He created them.' But if any of you has started to learn Hebrew or come to contact with it, you know that a man in Hebrew is *ish*. And a woman is *ishah*. And such words are in the second chapter of Genesis, where there is this beautiful, vivid story about creating man and woman. There is *ish*, *ishah* there. The famous sentence: This is why *ish* — man — leaves his mother and father and *vedaveku* — becomes attached to *ishah* — woman — and they become one flesh *ish ve ishah*. So it should be *ish ve ishah bara otam* — 'He created them a man and a woman.' But we have here: *zachar unekevah bara otam*. It is one of the very few occurrences of these words in such a meaning in the whole Scripture ... Because Hebrew is a very old and ancient language that originated from even older ancient Semitic languages, it is very specific and strong. ... *Zachar* in Polish means

Long before he was called to the See of Peter, Joseph Ratzinger presented Mary and Mariology as the guarantee of the dignity and freedom of man created in the image of God. In the context of negative theological and anthropological changes of the collapsing Western culture of a formerly Christian Europe, he wrote,

Mary is the believing other whom God calls. As such, she represents the creation, which is called to respond to God, and the freedom of the creature, which does not lose its integrity in love but attains completion therein. Mary thus represents saved and liberated man, but she does so precisely as a woman, that is, in

firm, stiff. In the Holy Scripture and the Hebrew Bible, it means male. In relation to animals, e.g. in sacrifices, it means a male. Note that the explicitness is strong. But in *unekebah*, the explicitness is also strong because *nekebah* comes from the verb *nakab*, which in Polish means to perforate. Therefore *nekebah* in Hebrew means female, womanly. In relation to animals, it is translated as a female. ... Please note how difficult it is for translators. How to translate into Polish language *zachar unekebah bara otam*? We translate it as 'man and woman He created them' ... But to a Hebrew ear, it is much more literal. What does it evoke? It evokes, first of all, sexuality. It indicates sex. Man has been created as male and female, as a man and a woman. Sexuality — we know it well — is intrinsically linked with physicality. We recognise a gender from the physical appearance, even without any hints. Note there is an emphasis on sexuality, and there is an emphasis on physicality. God created man male and female. And both sexes are two ways of being human beings. None of them is better or worse. But let's go back to this idea which is the destination point of our reflection. 'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves. ... God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.' Therefore, since we sense this richness of God's inner life, it is reflected in sex diversity in man. What links both sexes? What attracts them to each other? What makes one sex need the other? Love! This diversity is fulfilled in love. So human love, love of man, love of a man and a woman represents what makes God's inner life so rich. Further on, we will learn from the pages of the New Testament that God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and that what bonds the Divine Persons is Love. But at the very basis of creation, in God's plan of creating a man and a woman, there is a reproduction of who God is. But not only that. Note that since sex is inextricably linked to corporeality, we have a certain paradox. The image of the invisible God, the image of God who is an absolute spirit, is man with their physicality and materiality reflected in sexuality. Human corporeality, the corporeality of man, is, in a way, representative of what is Divine and who God is. If any of you remember old religion and catechism classes, there was a question: 'What is the image of God in a man?' And we were supposed to answer: 'The image of God in man is mind and free will.' And therefore, the image of God in man — as suggested in this catechism — is man's spiritual faculties. But when we consider this text from the Book of Genesis, we realize that the image of God in man, apart from spiritual faculties, or rather alongside spiritual faculties, is also man's corporeality intrinsically connected with sexuality. ... Therefore, in the creation of man and in the fact that man is the image of God, there is a possibility, a feeling, an intuition, a possibility that God may be able to become a man. The incarnation of the Son of God and the fact that God has become a man for us and our salvation have their foretaste, their earliest origin in creation itself. When we ask, like they used to ask in the Middle Ages: *Cur Deus homo?* — 'Why has God become a man?' the answer is: 'Because in the very act of creation, in the very act of being a man, there was such a great value included in corporeality and sexuality that it paved the way to the incarnation of the Son of God.'" Chrostowski, *Wcielenie a Księga Rodzaju* [The Incarnation and the Book of Genesis], p. 727–729).

the bodily determinateness that is inseparable from man: “Male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). The “biological” and the human are inseparable in the figure of Mary, just as are the human and the “theological.” This insight is deeply akin to the dominant movements of our time, yet it also contradicts them at the very core. While today’s anthropological program hinges more radically than ever before on “emancipation,” it seeks freedom whose goal is to “be like God” (Gen 3:5). But the idea that we can be like God implies a detachment of man from his biological conditionality, from the “male and female he created them.” This sexual difference is something that man, as a biological being, can never get rid of, something that marks man in the deepest center of his being. Yet it is regarded as an irrelevant triviality, as a constraint arising from historically fabricated “roles,” and is therefore consigned to the “purely biological realm,” which has nothing to do with man as such. Accordingly, this “purely biological” dimension is treated as a thing that man can manipulate at will because it lies beyond the scope of what counts as human and spiritual (so much so that man can freely manipulate the coming into being of life itself). This treatment of “biology” as a mere thing is accordingly regarded as a liberation, for it enables man to leave *bios* behind, use it freely, and be completely independent of it in every other respect, that is, to be simply a “human being” who is neither male nor female. But in reality, man thereby strikes a blow against his deepest being. He holds himself in contempt because the truth is that he is human only insofar as he is bodily, only insofar as he is man or woman.⁴⁴

Therefore Mary, who is the Immaculate Conception, is not a pious or theological idea, a “holy figure in a picture,” an archetype, or a personification of a mother goddess. She is a woman of flesh and blood, the New Eve, divinized in the mystery of her extraordinary union with Christ, the New Adam. By beginning and ending in the Triune God, she shows the true dignity and vocation of every person created “in the image and likeness of God” to live in *communion* with the Creator and Redeemer. Remaining in this communion means discovering and accepting oneself as a person

⁴⁴ Ratzinger, “Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole,” in *Mary: The Church at the Source*, p. 16–17.

created in the image and likeness of the Creator Himself. This is done by accepting Christ, because without Him no man can understand himself. That is the experience of salvation, which is in Christ and which is Christ Himself. Communion with Christ is through the Holy Spirit, of whom Mary is the face and the image. She does not succumb to the temptation to be like God by herself. She does not fall into the trap of a false freedom, but she reaches the fullness of humanity and divinization by obedience to the faith.

The woman clothed with the sun, a symbol of existing *in* and *because of* the ineffably close relationship with God, belongs to the humanity created *in Christ* and *for Christ*, receiving salvation from Him, through faith without which it is impossible to please God (cf. Heb 11:6; Jn 3:16–18). Thus, faith is a *personal relationship* with God, which He demands from Adam and Eve, created in His image. Christ, the New Adam “the leader and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:2), and Mary, the New and the first true Eve, clothed with the sun (which symbolizes God Himself) and standing on the moon as a sign of victory over the first Eve’s unfaithfulness, represent every person created according to God’s plan, and show the perfection of His work of creation.

“Male and female he created them!” Just as Christ and Mary cannot be separated if a believer wants to *understand* the mystery of the Immaculate Conception *in faith*, so the work of creation must not be separated from redemption, in which and through which the Triune God reveals Himself. As the Only God, He does not exist alone but is the Communion of Persons. Similarly, He manifests His glory in man created in His image as the Male and Female, Man and Woman: Christ and Mary. They show that the perfection of God’s creation is divinization. This is why God creates. God became Man so that man might be united with God. Man was created to participate in the trinitary life of the Creator and Redeemer Himself. In the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, Mary is the sign of this truth.

CHAPTER 3

Signs of the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception in the Life and Work of St. Stanislaus Papczyński

Exploring the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the light of the theology of the Paschal mystery allows it to be clearly stated that the Immaculate Conception is a *relational* and *personalistic* mystery. The Immaculate Conception is primarily the *Person* of the Holy Spirit so strongly united with the Virgin of Nazareth that she can exist as *Full of Grace* and become the Mother of the Word. That is why the exclamation: *Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio* (translated as “May the Virgin Mary’s Immaculate Conception be our salvation [not health] and our protection!”), which is so dear to the tradition of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, is fully justified. This salvation and protection is the fullness of the Holy Spirit, Who lives in Mary and makes her His temple. It is also the Paschal Christ, from Whom Mary receives life in the order of grace as the New Eve.

However, the Immaculate Conception is also the person of Mary herself, the Mother of Christ, in her *relationship* with the Triune God, Who does not act and reveal Himself through abstract concepts or theological ideas, but only *through* and *in living persons*. He does not live in buildings or any other works of human hands. God manifests Himself through man and lives in man, created in His image and likeness as His sign in the world. However, God, being not a “single person” but the Community of Persons, creates and reveals Himself through a community: firstly through a man and a woman who are called to make a family and through the Church — a family of Christ’s disciples not based on blood ties but on a relationship of faith and Christian love. In the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, Mary is the sign, the beginning, and the personification of this community. A relationship of mutual being is a sign here. On the one hand, Mary, in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, represents and embodies the Church because the Church exists *in* and as *a person* through her. Many years ago, Pope Benedict XVI, while still Cardinal Ratzinger, wrote about this concept, explaining a proper

understanding of *typology used in theology*.⁴⁵ On the other hand, as the community of those redeemed by Christ's blood and immersed in the mystery of His death and Resurrection, the Bride of the Lamb, *Ecclesia sancta et immaculata*, is a "church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing ... holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27). As such, the Church is also a sign of this reality of salvation and redemption found in Mary, which we call the mystery of her Immaculate Conception.

Therefore, the Church, being the universal sacrament of the salvation of man and the world, is also the sign of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, which summarizes her doctrine on salvation.⁴⁶ But as the mystery of the Immaculate Conception manifests itself exceptionally and particularly in Mary, the Mother of Christ, who completely devoted herself to it, this mystery similarly requires the personal and total devotion of those called by God to be witnesses and servants of the mystery from their very beginning of their lives.

One of the witnesses of this mystery is St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński (1631–1701), called by God to establish the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. The sole purpose of the Congregation, especially at the beginning of its existence, was to serve the mystery of Immaculate Conception by spreading and defending this truth, even at the price of the lives of its members. The *Oblatio* (self-offering) of St. Father Stanislaus Papczyński on December 11, 1670, testifies to this. The *Oblatio* is not only regarded as the expression of his piety and devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, but primarily as the charismatic founding act of the new religious community. This act, in which the person of the Founder offered himself to God and the Immaculate Virgin Mother, expressed the most profound sense of the community's existence and mission: to exist entirely for Christ and the Church (*Pro Christo et Ecclesia*), like Mary in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception.

1. Stanislaus "of Jesus and Mary"

Total and unconditional devotion to Christ and the Church is the most significant sign of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. The Second Vatican Council, teaching authentically on the Blessed Virgin

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole," p. 27–33

⁴⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), p. 71, note 29.

Mary, with all the weight of its authority, declared in number 56 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*:

Thus Mary, a daughter of Adam, consenting to the divine Word, became the mother of Jesus, the one and only Mediator. Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption.

The fruit of the fullness of the Spirit in Mary is her service to this mystery and complete devotion to Jesus and His work, the Church. As the personal Humility and Love of God, the Spirit exists entirely *for* others: for Christ and the Church. Those who, through faith, open themselves to His actions and deny themselves like Him may repeat after St. Paul the Apostle: "None of us lives for oneself and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:7–8). The Lord is united with Mary "by a close and indissoluble tie," as the constitution *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes (No. 53), who receives life from Him in the order of grace. For this reason, she is the personification and model of the Church. That is how we should perceive the mystery of the most sublime redemption of the Virgin Mother by the Son, Who, coming into the world, says to His Father: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ... then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll, Behold I come to do your will, O God.'" (Heb 10:5–7). Similarly, during the Annunciation, Mary expressed her total self-denial and devotion to God with the words: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word." (Lk 1:38). Unhindered by any sin, Mary dies to herself in order to live entirely for Christ and the Church. Her maternal presence at the Cross is the ultimate manifestation of this total devotion (cf. Jn 19:25–27).

This salvific relationship between Christ and His Mother became St. Father Stanislaus's life program. At the dawn of his religious consecration, he expressed it by taking the name *Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary*. The name Stanislaus, which in Sarmatian Poland was very popular at that time, is not as important as the addition of "Jesus and Mary." From the first biographer of St. Stanislaus Papczyński, the Franciscan Mansueto Leporini, who, wrote his work based on eyewitness accounts only four years after

the death of the saint, to the biography of the Founder by Venerable Father Casimir Wyszyński of 1754, and even in the most recent studies on our Father's life, there is a widely held awareness that:

when he was still in his mother's womb, she offered him to Christ the Lord and his Most Blessed Mother. He was born on the night between Saturday and Sunday, which could be seen as a sign of his future devotion to the Mother of the Lord. He became a sincere worshipper and promoter of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. He later founded a congregation devoted to this remarkable Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, as the Immaculate Conception.⁴⁷

1.1 From Jan to Stanislaus of *Jesus and Mary*

Providing this important information about the beginning of the life of the Marian's Founder, Fr. Casimir Wyszyński not only reports, following Leporini, the fact of St. Stanislaus being consecrated to Jesus and Mary (probably after his pregnant mother's miraculous rescue from the waters of the Dunajec River)⁴⁸ but also offers an interpretation of this event and his baptismal name, "Jan," given to him a day after his birth. The first Marian biographer of the Father Founder wrote that "at baptism, he was given the name Jan, which we now see as a prophetic

⁴⁷ Casimir Wyszyński, *Żywot Czcigodnego Sługi Bożego Ojca Stanisława od Jezusa Maryi, Założyciela Zgromadzenia Zakonnego Marianów Niepokalanego Poczęcia Błogosławionej Dziewicy Maryi dla wspomagania cierpiących w czyśćcu i pierwszego przełożonego tegoż Zgromadzenia Mariańskiego*, [the Life of the Venerable Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, the Founder of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of Most Blessed Virgin Mary for Serving the Suffering in the Purgatory, and the First Superior of the Marian Congregation] in *Stróż duchowego dziedzictwa Marianów. Wybór pism o Kazimierza Wyszyńskiego*, [The Guardian of the Spiritual Heritage of the Marian Father. Selected Writings of Fr. Casimir Wyszyński] ed. Zygmunt Proczek (Warsaw-Stockbridge: Stowarzyszenie Pomocników Mariańskich, 2004), p. 54.

⁴⁸ "One day, shortly before her son was due to be born, Sophia was returning home and had to cross the waters of the Dunajec in a boat operated by a ferryman. This rough river, about one kilometer away from Podegrodzie, was once quite wide and unregulated. Therefore, an attempt at crossing it during a storm was very dangerous. The waves hit the boat with such force, that Sophia fell into the water and almost drowned. It was a miracle that she did survive. Soon after she gave birth to a son. This event was confirmed by the witnesses in the Information Process. When Leporini writes that Fr. Stanislaus was dedicated to our Lord and to his Blessed Mother, even from his mother's womb, one may suppose that this act took place during the aforementioned crossing of Dunajec." (Tadeusz Rogalewski, *Lumen Marianorum, Stanislaus Papczynski, 1631–1701, Founder of the Congregation of Marian Fathers and Inspirer of the Marian School of Spirituality*, (Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2001), p. 46–47).

name, because Jan means God's grace, through which he was not only called to a religious life but also became the father and founder of the congregation devoted to the Most Chosen Virgin Mary."⁴⁹

His baptismal name, Jan, whose Hebrew root יָחַד stands for "grace," — and Jan means "one enjoying grace" — is fitting for the spiritual identity of the future *Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary*, as it prophetically indicates his life's vocation to *become a sign* of the mystery of the *fullness of grace*. This *fullness of grace* dwells in the Immaculate Heart of Mary as the Person of the Holy Spirit Who unites her, the Mother, inseparably with the Son from the very first moment of her conception.

However, as the *fullness of grace* in Mary demanded from her a response of faith to the point of the extreme self-emptying and self-denial that occurred when she stood at the Cross where her Son was hanging, similarly *becoming* a witness to this mystery required a constant struggle in Stanislaus Papczyński's life to create space within himself for the gift of grace. The Holy Spirit, the power of God that gives life through dying to self, will lead *Jan*, through the Holy Spirit's grace, to become *Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary*. The Holy Spirit will guide him through the roads of suffering and self-denial, that he might be able to one day open the eyes of his heart to the gift of God's vision, the *Divina visio*, concerning the founding of the Congregation of Marian Fathers. This congregation should become a visible sign of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception.

Following the inspiration of the Spirit, when the fullness of his time came, young Jan Papka from Podegrodzie left his mother and father and entered the path of *becoming* a new man according to the grace of the Spirit. In hagiographic style, the first written stories about Father Papczyński describe him as "a holy, pious, modest, and pure young man,"⁵⁰ who "from his childhood was being prepared by God to a lofty priestly state. Gifting him with graces, God revealed what kind of man he would be in the future. He let him shine at a young age with signs of future sainthood such as visiting churches, long fervent prayers, and Saturday fasts in honour of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary."⁵¹ However, even such a panegyric depiction of the young Papczyński does not omit the existence of some abruptness and impulsiveness in his nature. When a teenager, this led him to defend his older brother, as the hagiographer

⁴⁹ Wyszyński, *Żywot*, p. 54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

explains: When “his older brother was beaten by another boy, he took vengeance for the insult to his brother and properly beat the attacker. Because of that he again ran away (from school) [to] home for fear of punishment.” The hagiographer immediately comments that this situation “must have happened by God’s will” to protect the future saint from the demoralizing influences of a teacher from the school which young Jan Papczyński then attended. There is no doubt that from the beginning to the end of his life Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński was not a saint from a “holy card.” He was a man of flesh and blood, not without some deficiencies and weaknesses of which he was aware. He constantly struggled with them, putting more trusting in the work of God’s grace in his life than himself. At the age of 25, just before taking his vows in the Piarist Congregation, which he joined on July 2, 1654, he wrote, “May You be forever blessed, O Lord, and grant that, after [doing] so many evil deeds, I may do good deeds in my vocation, since I truly recognize that, of myself, I am not capable of doing anything that is good.”⁵²

The grace of holiness bestowed upon him in his mother’s womb did not immediately transform him into a saintly figure, but inspired him to undertake a lifelong self-denial, a pilgrimage of faith to *become a son in the Son*, indissolubly united to the Immaculate Mother through the action of the Holy Spirit. However, Father Casimir Wyszyński, writing about the perfection of the virtues of the Founder of his Congregation, in accordance with spirit of his times, in order to show an idealistic image of his holiness, does not hesitate to omit the youthful sins described by St. Stanislaus Papczyński himself in the above-quoted work from 1656 entitled *Secrets of Conscience*. This work contains a record of “his confession, his failures, and sins which he committed in his youth before entering the Order”⁵³ of the Piarists. However, even Father Wyszyński himself admits that

Satan sensing that the young Stanislaus would be in future his opponent ... began [the fight] by arousing in the young man loathing for learning, and then he tempted him persuading him that at home there is more freedom and less work. ... But God in his mercy ensured that the future candlestick of the Church

⁵² Saint Stanislaw Papczyński, *Secrets of Conscience* [*Secreta conscientiae*], First Fragment, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 853.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 1245.

was not hidden. ... Stanislaus ... broken by adversities got rid of laziness, or rather he overcame it.⁵⁴

Therefore, from the very beginning, his path to becoming Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary consisted in overcoming difficulties that resulted from his own weaknesses and from the deficiencies and sins of those whom he met and lived with. The difference between Father Stanislaus Papczyński and his companions was his uncompromising attitude and determination to struggle with himself, that the grace of the Holy Spirit might shine brightly within him. Others did not always understand or accept this mindset, and it exposed him to difficulties and persecution. This determination resulted from Stanislaus' deep experience of God's presence and action in his life, especially in moments of great suffering and trial. Many of his confreres among the Piarists and the first Marianists did not experience such a great suffering.

Leaving behind his initial difficulties in learning and the consequent humiliation as well as the numerous diseases and accidents from which he was rescued from by Divine Providence and protection of the Immaculate Virgin,⁵⁵ we need to take a deeper look at an event which probably most influenced the life choices of the future saint, which his first Marian biographer called "the Lvov Cross."

Viewing this event as "opening a gate into another reality," a contemporary Marian historian summarizes the story about the Lvov events written down by the first biographers of the Founder of the Marian Fathers thus:

The young Jan Papczyński went to Lvov in 1646 to devote himself to studies. There, after several months of various failures,

⁵⁴ Wyszynski, *Żywot*, p. 55.

⁵⁵ "He received many graces through her intercession and experienced her miraculous protection. Not through doctors' assistance, but thanks to God's grace and constant mediation of the Virgin Mary, he was saved from severe diseases and dangers. One day, he was miraculously healed when he was burned by boiling chicken broth so severely that his legs became swollen. Twice he caught such severe infectious diseases that he was losing his mind, but after drinking some cold water, he recovered his previous health. In Podoliniec, unconscious because of a severe illness, he suddenly regained his health and strength. And on his way to Rawa, during an autumn break, in the town of Raszyn, he contracted a fever that didn't go away for a very long time, but he was healed. Later, ill with a plaque, he vowed to make a pilgrimage to Jasna Góra, to the miraculous image of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, and he was miraculously saved from death. When he was 10, he fell off a tall ladder and was severely injured, but soon he was well. Again, when pulled into the waves of the Vistula River near Płock or drawn down by a whirlpool in Jarosław, he was miraculously saved, armed with God's help and always protected by the Most Blessed Virgin Mary." Ibid., p. 56–57.

he contracted a disease and suffered from such a high fever that he almost lost his life. The debilitating illness lasted 15 weeks, bringing him to a deplorable state. His body was covered with hideous scabies. The owners of the house where he stayed, fearing he had gotten infected with leprosy, callously got rid of him, throwing him into the street. Jan sought refuge in a shelter but was not allowed to stay there. Overnight, he became a homeless beggar, sick, in pain, without any human help, a stranger to all but God. Severe winter, snow and bitter cold found him in this dire condition, making it even more dramatic. Helpless against the overwhelming circumstances, he wandered the streets of Lvov, sleeping under the stars or protecting himself from cold in a haystack. He ate what he begged together with a mysterious young man. On Christmas Eve, symptoms of the disease worsened, depriving him of strength. Completely abandoned and buried in a haystack, Jan reflected on the Savior who, for our redemption, was born in a manger and laid on hay. He was like the biblical Job and the begging Lazarus in his terrible illness and loneliness: covered in sores and foul-smelling wounds. After a few days, he crawled out of the haystack and dragged himself to the town. Reaching the first buildings, he only managed to crawl into a hallway of a certain house and collapsed. A family who lived there showed him mercy and let him stay. Here he shared the fate of the biblical Job: domestic dogs came to him meekly and licked his wounds to relieve his suffering.⁵⁶

Experiencing such extreme physical and spiritual suffering along with humiliation resulting from rejection and contempt at such a young age, neither closed nor hardened his heart. On the contrary, it opened him to the reality of the One and Only God revealing Himself in the Cross of Christ. After enduring the hardships of the “Lvov Cross,” Jan Papczyński began a new chapter in his life, not yet as Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary (a name he would receive in the Piarist novitiate), but as a young Christian now fully conscious of his faith and desiring to belong entirely to the Crucified Christ and his Sorrowful Mother, to whom he owed his rescue and his new life. The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, who is the Holy Spirit uniting the Mother with the Son more closely than her

⁵⁶ Jan Kosmowski, *Marianie 1671–1788*, (Warsaw: PROMIC, 2020), p. 24–25.

physical motherhood to Him, was already then the salvation and protection of the young Papczyński. During Jan's short visit home between the successive stages of his studies, humble work grazing his father's sheep — who *gratis victum non dabat* (did not give food for free) — helped him to preserve a "pure and holy conscience"⁵⁷ guarded the authentically Christian spirituality that had formed in his heart through experiencing suffering and God's salvation and comfort, which came through Mary.

For this reason, after his acceptance as a Piarist novice on July 2, 1654, Stanislaus zealously fulfilled even the most difficult ministries and novitiate work⁵⁸ and demonstrated a maturity of faith far surpassing that of his fellows. His maturity of faith was even more evident in his readiness to shed his blood for Christ and the Church during the Swedish invasion of Poland, the Swedish Deluge, which was actually a religious war aimed at destroying the Catholic faith in the lands of the Polish Commonwealth of that time. The saint wrote about it himself many years later, just before his death, in the testament left to the Marians:

I, Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, formerly a member of the Congregation of Pious Schools, now by the mercy of God a religious — though unworthy — of the Order of the Immaculate Conception, out of love for God fulfilling the divine decree, according to which all men must die once, publicly declare that I depart from this earthly life in the Roman Catholic faith, for which I was ready to shed my blood during the Swedish War. When I was going from the [Old] City with my companion near [the church of] the Dominican Fathers, a heretical soldier attacked me with an unsheathed sword. Meanwhile, my companion (although he was German) fled, [as] I, having knelt down, presented my neck to be cut off; but by Divine Providence, it so happened that I was not wounded at all, even though I was quite strongly struck three times. However, for about an hour

⁵⁷ "Thus do I thank God, that by His Will, I was then obligated by my parents to pasture sheep (I dare to admit this with a peaceful conscience), since while I was in the pastures amid the flock, I kept my conscience pure and holy! O Lord! I humbly ask this of You, that this, the Providence of Your Majesty — which I expect [to guide me] in the future and in which I trust — guide me until the end of my life, that You may be praised in all of my deeds, thoughts, and words. Amen." Papczyński, *Secrets of Conscience*, Second Fragment, p. 853–854.

⁵⁸ "Since the beginning of the novitiate, he had such a desire for virtues that he surpassed others who had been longer in the congregation. He used to undertake the lowest chores. He cleaned the stables, halls, or other places; he carried water from the well during severe frost with hands covered with ice and hurting from a freezing blizzard." Wyszyński, *Żywot*, p. 66).

and a half, I experienced enormous pain. Now, I give thanks to the Divine Goodness, that He preserved me for an even longer martyrdom. For I suffered very grievous persecutions in the Congregation of Pious Schools. I was even nearly killed on account of enmity, and finally, I was most unfairly deprived of my first vocation. Before God, I forgive all those who have caused this.⁵⁹

This readiness to sacrifice his life for Christ and the Church, the essence of the authentic Christian faith, accompanied Father Stanislaus throughout his entire earthly pilgrimage. And although, as he confessed on his deathbed, he had been ready to undergo martyrdom at the beginning of his religious life, as a 24-year-old young man, God willed a different type of martyrdom for him — one less spectacular but more in line with the example of the Crucified Christ and His Sorrowful Mother. For being the Immaculate Conception through the *fullness* of the grace of the Spirit, she *fully* revealed her *identity* through *full* participation in the sufferings of her Son dying on the Cross. Thus, as the mystery of the spiritual relationship between the Mother and the Son, from Whom she receives life according to the Spirit, the Immaculate Conception of Mary most fully manifests itself in the Gospel scene, which the Theologian, St. John the Evangelist, described in the simple words, “Standing by the cross of Jesus was his Mother” (see Jn 19:25). Later, Jan Papczyński also stood near this cross as Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary.

1.2 Stanislaus of Christ, the Crucified, and Mary, the Mother of Consolation

Upon taking the Piarist’s habit, Jan Papczyński received the name Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary. This was another important step in discovering God’s will for him. Although the experience of “the Lvov Cross” deepened his faith and awareness of the mystery of God revealed in the Crucified Christ and he was prepared to sacrifice his life for this faith during the Swedish Deluge, this did not mean that his process of becoming *a son in the Son* was complete. God did not desire from him only a one-time act of heroism, which would not have been too difficult for a young and zealous religious, especially after experiencing

⁵⁹ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *Second Testament*, No. 1–2, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 934–935.

so much suffering. Instead the Divine Providence set him on a path of daily dying to himself, his plans, and his vision of serving Christ and the Church. *Divina visio*, the Divine vision concerning his life and all activities undertaken in the name of the love of God and man, demanded from Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary many sacrifices and acts of self-denial. However, these actions should not be seen only as the heroic deeds of a spiritual giant, but rather as “bands of love” (Hos 11:4) with which the Suffering Christ (*Christus Patiens*) attracted the zealous religious of Podegrodzie, thus making a space for the Divine Presence in his heart by involving him in the mystery of His Passion. Although this suffering seemed like a crushing defeat, Stanislaus accepted it with love for the Crucified Orator (*Orator Crucifixus*), and it opened the eyes of his heart to *Divina visio*, God’s plan that Providence revealed to him.

The first and most crucial unveiling of this plan for his future life coincided with him writing and self-publishing the work mentioned above, *The Crucified Orator*, a collection of sermons on the Passion of our Lord based on the last seven words of Jesus on the Cross. The text was first published in the old royal town of Kraków in 1670, where Father Papczyński had been residing since September 1669, through his own efforts. His disagreement with the superiors of the Piarist Order, which had been growing since 1664,⁶⁰ escalated to the point that he decided to

⁶⁰ “In 1664, a painful conflict between Father Stanislaus and his superiors started. The reason for the dispute was the matter of religious discipline and the ideal of extreme poverty. In its initial stage, it concerned [the] election of a superior of the Polish Province and his assistants who were designated in Rome by the general government. Stanislaus Papczyński believed that the rules established by Pope Alexander VII allowed for electing superiors in individual provinces and claimed that the chapter of the Polish Province should take place in Poland, not in Rome. He argued that the general did not know the country’s situation or the designated people well. Actions he took encountered opposition ‘among older fathers.’ Moreover, there were also antagonisms on the grounds of nationality. The province established in 1662 included two nations: Polish and German, to which Slovaks, Czechs, and Hungarians, not always friendly towards each other, were added. Several monks, unfavourable towards Father Stanislaus, falsely accused him, misinterpreting his eagerness to strictly observe the religious rules ordered by the founder, especially those relating to poverty, silence, and a religious organization. As a result, Stanislaus Papczyński was accused of factiousness before the general of the Piarists, Father Cosma Chiara, and called to Rome. The news of his forced travel to Rome mobilized his friends to defend the unjustly accused. Before he set out on the journey, which proved to be very painful, he received numerous commendations and letters of recommendation from many congregations and important personalities. [The] Apostolic Nuncio in Poland, who was in office then, Cardinal Galeazzo Marescotti, after reading the case, demanded examining it in court by the Piarists themselves. An investigation was launched after which the main prosecutor of Father Stanislaus, Father Wacław Opatowski (the current provincial in Poland), admitted that ‘it was rather a zeal than factiousness ... , Father Stanislaus was neither a troublemaker nor a traitor, and he did not plot against the order.’ But these were just words without any practical consequences. Wacław Opatowski, who hated Father

legally leave the Order of the Pious Schools, out of concern for maintaining peace in the young Polish province of the Piarist congregation, founded only in 1662 and then experiencing an internal crisis.

It was probably the most difficult decision in the 70-year life of our Founder. It involved great suffering, which significantly influenced his further spiritual and psychological growth. To explain his reasons for this decision, he dedicated a separate work to defending this action, entitled *Apologia for His Departure from the Order of Pious Schools* [*Apologia pro Egressu e Scholis Piiis*].⁶¹ In his other texts, called the historical writings, he often references this painful fact, which he accepted as the cross of his life. In the fragment of the *Second Testament* mentioned above, Father Stanislaus confessed that after the grievous persecutions, in which he was almost killed, he was unfairly deprived of his first vocation:⁶² to be in “the Congregation of Pious Schools — dearer to him than life — in that sweetest Society of the Poor of the Mother of God,”⁶³ which he had never intended to leave. For he had vowed to persevere in this Congregation until death. So how did it happen? Did Father Papczyński decide to leave the Piarists because he planned to establish a new congregation, as the witnesses of the informative process claimed?⁶⁴ No evidence confirms the hypothesis that the persecutions he suffered in the Piarist Congregation were related to his plans to establish a new religious community. Additionally, his account of leaving the Congregation of the Pious Schools is so painful it is hard to doubt that his departure was caused by anything other than a real necessity to maintain brotherly peace in the community, for which he had given so much to build up. That is how he writes about it:

Papczyński, did not even try to be faithful to his words. The relationship between Stanislaus Papczyński and his superiors did not improve, either. Therefore, to ensure peace in the province, Father Papczyński decided to leave the Piarist congregation. On August 15, 1669, he sent a request to be released from the vows and the oath of perseverance in the Piarist order to the general. That is how he explained it in the *Apologia*: ‘Although I considered that I am neither a firebrand nor an instigator nor a betrayer, nevertheless — surmising that on my account such disturbances arose — whereas those ill-disposed [toward me] arose and conspired my destruction and ruin, those favorable [toward me] defended and protected me. From this arose among them numerous conflicts and arguments; so I decided finally to depart from the Congregation of Pious Schools, for the good of peace and for the tranquillity of the Province.’ It was an expression of true love for the congregation and the confreres.” Kosmowski, *Marianie 1671–1788*, p. 32–34.

⁶¹ See St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 873–900.

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 934.

⁶³ Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 2, p. 900.

⁶⁴ Cf. St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Apologia for His Departure from the Order of Pious Schools*, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 874.

It is quite difficult to explain how much I valued my vocation, roused by God Himself. Even more, I remained in this holiest company, bound not only by the bonds of love but also by the solemn obligation of the oath to persevere in it forever. I desired the first to be indissoluble, while the second was dissolved by the one to whom has been given the authority of binding and loosing, the Vicar of the Most Holy Jesus Christ, the legitimate successor of St. Peter, Pope Clement X. Yet, ah! How it came to this! What a way of the cross! Furthermore, unimaginable confusions, scruples, doubts, anguish, and fears tormented and tortured me. For who could have such a lax conscience that, without these, he could pass from the state of religious vows (even if they were simple) to a merely secular [state of life]?⁶⁵

His painful cross in life, the decision to leave the beloved Congregation of the Piarists, casts a shadow over the entire future life of Father Stanislaus Papczyński. It scandalized many of his contemporaries, who judged him through the prism of the gossip and slander surrounding this problematic fact. It was a scandal to later generations as well, including the Marians themselves, who, not knowing how to deal with this inconvenient truth, tried to either cover it with pious silence or justify it by attributing it to motivations regarding the founding of a new congregation. For instance, Venerable Servant of God Casimir Wyszyński, following the example of Leporini, swiftly moves from merely mentioning the persecutions and difficulties Father Stanislaus experienced with the Piarists during his last six years in their congregation, to due respect and admiration for him being deemed worthy to found a new religious congregation.

He was fulfilling the constitutions of Blessed Joseph Calsanz, his founder, with the utmost eagerness. That is why he calmly and patiently endured many crosses, confusion, and hatred, almost to the danger of death. Seeing his patience and work undertaken for the glory of God and his Most Gracious Mother, by applying various stimuli through inspirations and divine revelations that confessors and theologians recognized as valid and unfailingly known, the merciful Lord called him to establish a new Institute in his Church, in order to increase devotion to the Immaculate

⁶⁵ Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 2–3, p. 901–902.

Conception, to assist parish priests in pastoral work and to bring assistance to the deceased. Therefore, obedient to the voice of God and his own commendable readiness, he changed his first vocation. On Wednesday, in the octave of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on December 11, 1670, Fr. Michael of the Visitation released him — with the consent of the Supreme Vicar of Christ, Clement X and the Superior General — from his simple vows and oaths of perseverance. At that time, he offered himself anew in his Institute to God and his Mother, having received the blessing from the father mentioned above “May God strengthen what he has done in you.” [This father] noticed stability in virtues, outstanding holiness, and an unwavering will of Fr. Stanislaus to found such a congregation.⁶⁶

This hagiographic emphasis was used here to hide an inconvenient truth — not fitting an idealistic image of holiness — about Father Papczyński's reasons for leaving the Piarist Order. These reasons are listed in his *Apologia*,⁶⁷ and certainly Father Wyszyński knew them well. However, he tried to ignore them, thus unfortunately covering with pious dust another essential truth about Father Stanislaus, or rather the suffering which was necessary for both him and his future work as the Founder of Marians.⁶⁸ In the cited text from *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, he himself compares these difficult events he experienced to the painful Way of the Cross he had to undertake.

As the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is closely connected with Mary's co-suffering with Christ — for by dying to herself, Mary became the *Daughter of her Son* and the Mother of the Church — similarly, Father Papczyński, chosen by God to be a sign of this mystery as Stanislaus of *Jesus and Mary*, had to undergo suffering and be born anew in a Paschal way. The suffering he humbly accepted out of love for Christ and his congregation, whose superiors put him to such a hard test, was therefore necessary, that it might open a new space in his heart for the grace of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit, Who unites Mary

⁶⁶ Wyszyński, *Żywot*, p. 69.

⁶⁷ They are: hostility experienced from the superiors in 1664–1670; the relaxation of the observance of the old rule of a religious life set for the Piarists by their founder, St. Joseph Calasanz; love for the Congregation and sacrificing yourself for the sake of restoring peace; impediments in utilizing natural talents.

⁶⁸ Cf. Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 8, p. 905.

with Christ, enabled Father Papczyński to become the Father of a new community in the Church.

So, Father Casimir Wyszynski's intuition that "seeing his patience and work undertaken for the glory of God and His Most Gracious Mother, ... the merciful Lord called him to establish a new Institute in His Church, in order to increase devotion to the Immaculate Conception," is entirely accurate. However, it requires an interpretation according to the logic of the Paschal Mystery, which means a reformulation in the reverse order. It should rather be said that because God chose Father Stanislaus to found the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception in the Church, God burdened him with suffering. However, God also gave him the gift of patient acceptance and endurance of all these things for his own spiritual benefit and that of his future congregation.

Therefore, in the design of God's Providence, Father Stanislaus Papczyński's departure from the Piarists was undoubtedly necessary, so that he could devote himself entirely to the work for which God had destined him. Therefore when he sent his first request to the General of the Piarists for release from his vow of perseverance in their congregation on August 15, 1669, it was certainly not because he wished to establish the Congregation of the Marian Fathers. It is impossible to reconcile such an assumption with the painful confession of Father Papczyński in *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*: "How it came to this! What a way of the cross!" These words, written almost six years after first requesting release from the Piarists and five years after his departure, sound very dramatic. Also, the crisis Father Papczyński immediately underwent after leaving his first congregation on December 11, 1670, with the result that in the same month he asked for readmission,⁶⁹ clearly shows that the decision to leave the Order of the Pious Schools was not the result of careful calculations to found the Marian Congregation. "Immediately before being released,"⁷⁰ and not long before the event occurred, the Divine Majesty inspired him to bind himself with the new vow called the *Oblatio*, which is of great importance for the Marians, as it represents a charismatic beginning of the Marian Congregation.

⁶⁹ "It seems that Fr. Papczyński is referring to his own inner state after being released from his vows in the Piarists (December 11, 1670). To help resolve such doubts and to be more certain about the will of God for him, he applied (under certain conditions) for readmission to the Piarists towards the end of 1670" Cf. *Positio*, p. 219 (Doc. VII, A, 2, intr.) Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, p. 902, note 222).

⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, No. 3, s. 902.

The crisis associated with, and even caused by, his departure from the Piarists manifested itself in another significant fact: When, in Kraków at the end of 1670, Father Papczyński finally managed to publish a long-written work on the Passion of Christ entitled *The Crucified Orator*, he declined to use his religious name, Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary. This could be understandable, because at the time he had not been a member of the Piarist Order for some time and belonged temporarily to the clergy of the Archdiocese of Kraków, remaining under the jurisdiction of Archbishop Andrzej Trzebicki. However, his later return to the name Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary in other writings indicates that the Polish priest Jan Papczyński — the name on the title page of *The Crucified Orator* — was gone forever. The deep suffering caused by the hardships (especially the imprisonment) he had endured and his departure from the Piarists shaped Father Papczyński as Stanislaus of the Crucified Christ and Mary, the Sorrowful Mother, who in his life was the Mother of Consolation and the Refuge of Sinners. In the meditation on the third word of Christ on the Cross he wrote:

God, the Father of mercies, desires that — after Him — we place all our hope of eternal life in this Mother of ours. For He has already spoken about this to St. Catherine of Siena, that prodigy of sanctity, the illustrious star of the Dominican Family: “Out of my Goodness and respect for the Incarnate Word, it was granted to Mary, the glorious Mother of my only begotten Son, that no one, whether righteous or sinner, who flies to her in devout veneration would be plundered or devoured by the infernal demon in any manner. For she has been chosen, prepared, and ordained by me as the sweetest bait for catching men and especially sinners.”⁷¹

Discovering his spiritual identity as a witness of the mystery of the salvific relationship between the Crucified Christ and his Compassionate and Sorrowful Mother more and more deeply, Father Papczyński forever retained a sense of realism about himself. He perceived himself as a sinner who, after being endowed with grace and mercy, was obliged to call others to repentance, doing so with the zeal that often earned him enemies.

In the year following his departure from the Order of the Pious Schools, Father Stanislaus referred to the accusations that may have been made against him by his former confreres and acquaintances, both secular

⁷¹ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Crucified Orator*, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 713.

and ecclesiastical. He wrote about this in his *Apologia*, which was probably written in Lubocza while he served as a chaplain to the noble Karski family.

For I was the first professed member among the Poles. I was not the lowest priest in the first Warsaw house as a preacher; I was the most concerned about the improvement both of myself and of others. For at one time, I seemed to run after frivolous behavior with others, [yet] I strove to draw them back together with me to the established order of observing the holy Rule of religious life.⁷²

Giving thanks to the Divine Providence for completing the work, even when the means or persons chosen to fulfill the plan are weak and insufficient in human understanding he confesses without a trace of false humility:

This [truth] manifested itself most clearly in me, the most wretched sinner, the most worthy of disdain, [the] most miserable, the most unfit instrument [used by God] for founding the least, the smallest Congregation of Fathers of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary Conceived Immaculate. Within me, I had an unbecoming spirit, no virtue, little prudence; everything was far too small, proper more for dreaming rather than for undertaking a matter of such great difficulty. But just as God Himself (to whom be everlasting, endless glory and thanksgiving) lovingly, mercifully, wisely, and miraculously inspired me to this work of His Providence, so also He Himself has brought it about — and He will bring it to completion, forever and ever.⁷³

2. *Divina visio* and *Oblatio* as a Gift and an Answer

Father Stanislaus' profound self-awareness of his lowliness and sinfulness towards God is not a sign of a special asceticism and excessive modesty, nor can it be attributed to the Baroque era rhetorical style disposed to exaggeration in both praising and depreciating. A sense of realism and humility which, as Father Stanislaus repeated after St. Teresa of Jesus, is simply true,⁷⁴ is always the fruit of an authentic experience of

⁷² Papczyński, *Apologia*, No. 13, p. 880–881.

⁷³ Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 1, p. 901.

⁷⁴ "In short: humility consists in an open, honest, genuine, and sincere spirit, and in similar actions. ... For humility (as a certain doctor teaches on the basis of the observation and revelation of St.

God, Who reveals Himself to a man as Love which is forgiving, comforting, and calling. Father Stanislaus seems to reference such a love in an earlier quotation, in which he confesses that, although aware of his lowliness, he knows with unwavering certainty that as God “lovingly, mercifully, wisely, and miraculously inspired [him] to this work of his Providence, so also he himself has brought it about — and he will bring it to completion, forever and ever.”

This work, which Father Papczyński felt called to, had its roots in the event which he described as *Divina visio* — “Divine vision.” This “divine vision” which he said, “had been engraved upon my soul regarding the foundation of this Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M., ... impelled [him] to this goal.”⁷⁵ What was this goal? Was it the “the Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which, by God’s grace, [he] intended to found)”?⁷⁶ Certainly, yes. But it seems there was something more than that: *a response to the gift* of the grace of a special encounter with God in *Divina visio*. This response is the *Oblatio*, the total consecration of himself to God and to the Virgin Mary, whom, from then on, he will venerate particularly in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, manifesting the essence of his vocation more through his lifestyle than his words or writings. In fact, the *Oblatio* of Father Stanislaus is not only the singular charismatic and founding act of December 11, 1670, but an icon of his entire life and vocation, expressing both the deepest meaning of his religious life and the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

2.1 *Divina visio*

What was this mysterious Divine vision engraved on the heart of the Founder of the Marian Congregation? When and where did it happen? According to most Marian researchers, we do not have any information about this crucial event that gave Father Papczyński’s life a new meaning and laid the foundations for the Congregation of the Marian Fathers, because no written sources can identify the time and location of this event. However, Fr. Tadeusz Rogalewski clearly suggested that “the idea

Teresa) is nothing other than the truth.” *Examination of the Heart*, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, s. 508.

⁷⁵ Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 6, p. 904.

⁷⁶ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *Self-Offering*, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 872.

of founding the Congregation of Marian Fathers may have appeared in Father Stanislaus Papczyński's soul during his imprisonment in Podoliniec and Prievidza,"⁷⁷ which are located in present-day Slovakia. This period of imprisonment can be dated between January 28 and March 22, 1670. But could the situation of the tormented and oppressed prisoner, refused even the spiritual comfort of the sacraments⁷⁸ by the former "author of his vocation,"⁷⁹ now a hostile provincial superior, be a good time for reflections resulting in a decision to found a new congregation? Should the founding of the Marian Congregation be perceived as the fruit of Father Papczyński's considerations and reflections, as if it were a pious, but after all, only human project? Before we answer this question, we must permit St. Father Stanislaus to speak for himself about the painful events in his life which were the cornerstone of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. This is how Father Founder describes his last months at the Piarists:

I was finally moved to Kraków under the pretext of a reprinting of a book, and when the Congregation was already transformed into an Order, I placed myself under the jurisdiction of the Most Illustrious and Reverend local Ordinary. Therefore, I did not consider that I could remain in the Order in peace. He came [Fr. W. Opatowski, his provincial] from Podoliniec to Kraków and seized me in the most cruel manner with the help of two Ruthenians he brought with himself. Although I wanted to travel by foot, he enclosed me in a covered cart, and half naked, he transported me in the most severe winter for about twenty Gallic miles. On the road, he nearly killed me with the cart pole that was lowered and pushing into my neck. In Podoliniec, while still ill, he imprisoned me in a locked room and forbade the Sacrament of Extreme Unction to be given to me (as I had asked for it). He ordered that no one come near to me, even as I was already almost dying. He did not permit me to write a letter to the General and to the [Cardinal] Protector, and he oppressed me with such violence, that one would find this with difficulty even among tyrants. Finally, when my Protector, my Most Illustrious diocesan Bishop of Kraków, demanded from

⁷⁷ Tadeusz Rogalewski, *Stanislaus Papczynski (1631-1701): Founder of the Order of Marians and Inspirer of the Marian School of Spirituality* (Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2001), p. 193.

⁷⁸ Cf. Papczyński, *Apologia*, No. 19, p. 883

⁷⁹ Papczyński, *Apologia*, No. 12, p. 880.

him that he bring me back to Kraków, he attempted rather for me to be transported to Hungary, again under the guard of two soldiers. He ordered that I be held and imprisoned there, until I be freed by a letter from Fr. General, who already wanted to release me from the Congregation. He finally denounced me among all the houses, such that among the fathers of the Province who were favorable to me, he excited horrible enmity [toward me].⁸⁰

The situation of the imprisoned Father Papczyński, who was exhausted by cold, sickness, and above all the hostility of the superiors, not fitting human, and even less so, Christian dignity, certainly did not facilitate reflections on founding a new congregation. The isolated prisoner could not do anything on his own, which was probably the goal of God's Providence for him. His final efforts to defend himself and his just cause were fruitless. He was not even allowed to write a letter to his potential protectors. Thus, the situation of total abandonment, as occurred in Lvov, happened again. And again, the Lord comforted and strengthened him with His Presence, precisely through *Divina visio*.

Although Father Papczyński does not directly reference it, we can, and perhaps even should, view this culminating moment of his life through comparison with the Lvov events. For just as we know almost nothing about the spiritual experiences of the young Papczyński during the long period of his terrible illness in Lvov, when dogs licked his wounds, so we are also completely ignorant of what transpired in his heart for the almost three months which he spent in the Piarist prison in modern-day Slovakia. We only know that as he was miraculously, yet quite prosaically, cured of the illness with the help of the dogs licking his sores, so he was finally released from imprisonment thanks to the regular intervention of the auxiliary bishop of Kraków. Just as the illness and recovery in Lvov opened a new horizon for his life at that time, he emerged from his solitary confinement transformed and ready to carry out God's plans for himself. So, what really happened there? We do not know. But, just as he had realized almost 24 years earlier in Lvov that he could not achieve anything alone and that everything in his life was the result of God's Providence, he now received an unshakable conviction that a divine vision received during his imprisonment was a sign of comfort and support from God. This vision had engraved in his soul the foundation of the Congregation

⁸⁰ Ibid., No. 19–20, p. 883–884.

of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, and he openly shared this conviction with others. It was God, Who as He “lovingly, mercifully, wisely, and miraculously inspired [him] to this work of his Providence, so also he himself has brought it about — and he will bring it to completion, forever and ever.”

The foundation of the Congregation of Marian Fathers was not, therefore, a logical consequence of pious and holy, but purely human desires and considerations of Father Papczyński, who, discouraged by the difficulties at the Piarists, decided to establish his own congregation, because he valued a religious vocation more than life and desired to be more than a diocesan priest. Founding the Congregation was not only about his private and very Polish devotion to the Mother of God, focused on a special love for her Immaculate Conception. The decision to found a new congregation was undoubtedly the fruit of God’s supernatural action in the life of Father Stanislaus, whom God “called [by] ... applying various stimuli through inspirations and divine revelations that confessors and theologians recognized as true and unfailingly known.”⁸¹ But everything started with the *Divina visio*, which led Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary beyond himself, lifting him above his problems, sufferings, ambitions, and private projects. From that moment on, Father Papczyński was convinced — as he confessed on the death bed — that the true Founders of his Congregation, inspired⁸² by God Himself, were Jesus and Mary.⁸³

Such a presentation of the matter by our Father Founder himself does not permit only a historical and chronological summary of the facts of his life relating to the foundation of the Congregation. Because one of these facts is undoubtedly the *Divina visio*, it would be merely a pseudo-analysis, taking into consideration only a human dimension of the event and person of Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary. Properly understanding his life and work requires a theological approach that takes into account both the broader and more specific context of events, as well as their analogies with the lives and vocations of other “men and women of God,” who witnessed to the faith and mystery of God revealed in the Crucified and Risen Christ.

⁸¹ Wyszynski, *Żywot*, p. 69.

⁸² Cf. *The First Testament*, No. 7, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 928.

⁸³ “As its unworthy Superior, I most devoutly entrust this tiny Congregation forever to my Lord, Jesus Christ, and to the Most elect Virgin, His Mother Mary, as the true and only Founders, Directors, Protectors, and Patrons of this tiny Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, Helper of the Deceased.” *Second Testament*, No. 5, p. 935.

For this reason, what must be considered here first are the events that directly preceded Father Papczyński's imprisonment and his spiritual — even mystical — encounter with God during this time of trial, which revealed a new horizon in his life. In September 1669, he arrived in Kraków by the instruction of his superiors to complete the fourth edition of his popular handbook on rhetoric entitled *Messenger of the Queen of Arts*,⁸⁴ This was in fact only a pretext to remove him from Warsaw. In Kraków, Father Papczyński met Francis Korwin Kochanowski, OFM, a brother of Dominik Korwin Kochanowski, OFM, already deceased at that time. Dominik Korwin Kochanowski was the author of a work strongly favouring the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. When Father Stanislaus Papczyński met the Franciscan in the printing house where he published his *Messenger of the Queen of Arts*, Fr. Kochanowski probably asked him to support and approve his brother's immaculastic book. Father Stanislaus expressed his appreciation for this work in a short poem, *Triumph of the Great Virgin Conceived Without Original Sin*. The poem reads as follows:

Behold the triumph! Under the Marian foot
 The head of the hostile Dragon.
 He groans: we sing without sin conceived,
 Behold the triumph! Of the Virgin.
 The Stygian serpent was able to infect
 The first Parents with his venom:
 He was not able to breathe on the Great Virgin,
 The Virgin Parent of God;
 All are born, however many from the loins of Adam
 Are born, children of wrath:
 From a Mother born of gracious name
 Is born, the Virgin of Grace.
 The sin which pollutes all of mankind,
 is absent, is absent from the Virgin.
 Conceived against the order of nature she was;
 As she herself conceived God.
 Therefore when [what is] posterior is believed,
 Why is [what is] prior not suitable for believing?
 In this learned book KOCHANOVIVS

⁸⁴ See *Selected Writings*, p. 87–97.

Rightly teaches, beautifully proves.
 Behold the triumph! The wicked Dragon is conquered,
 Behold the triumph! He is conquered.
 Hence, you, then, KOCHANOVIVS,
 By the pious triumph that you have prepared for the Great Virgin
 You are rightly called KOCHANOVIVS of the Virgin Herself.
 [Thus] speaks Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński of the Order of Clerics
 Regular of the Pious Schools of the Mother of God.⁸⁵

This poem was included in the introduction to the second posthumous edition of Korwin Kochanowski's work *Novus Asserendae Immaculatae Conceptionis Deiparae Virginis Modus*. The Franciscan theologian's extensive 300-page work, which referred to the school of John Duns Scotus and used the scholastic methods of Scotus' time to prove that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin and triumphed over Satan, the serpent of old. This work significantly impacted Father Papczyński, who was struggling with evil and trying not to return the hostility and aversion of his superiors. An undoubted proof of his victory in this battle was his sincere love for the Congregation of the Piarists, despite the persecutions he suffered, and his forgiveness, expressed in these words addressed to his former confreres:

I do not state this, most beloved, for their shame (because I do not wish that anybody be ashamed) on account of this enmity toward me, on account of this great opposition to the laws, or on account of the many and quite serious reasons (for they are many and even more serious, which I pass over in silence) given for my departure from your Community. But I pray that they feel contrition. I certainly suffer rightly for my sins. So what awaits you? On my side, there is true love, in which I desire to remain; however, there is judgment on the side of God, who knows intimately the most secret thoughts and the heart. I, however, most humbly bend the knee before His goodness for your love. Do the same for me, so that at least mutually beseeching Him for forgiveness, or that here [on earth] rather than elsewhere, He may punish us, because He is truly just.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 842.

⁸⁶ Papczyński, *Apologia*, No. 54, p. 899–900.

However, before Father Stanislaus wrote down these words, he had to undergo a trial, that he could understand that victory over the hostility which Satan spreads in the hearts of people affected by the sin of Adam is, above all, a gift of God's grace and not the result of a person's ascetic and religious efforts. His imprisonment by Provincial Opatowski may be therefore understood as the necessary preparation of his heart in order to accept the grace of God comforting and calling him to be a witness to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, which is her victory — thanks to the grace of the Spirit — over the hostility of “the Stygian serpent.”

It is worth noting that St. Beatriz da Silva (1424–1492), who founded the female monastic Order of the Immaculate Conception, commonly called the Conceptionist Franciscans, also experienced humiliating imprisonment. This imprisonment was ordered by Queen Isabella of Castile, whose lady-in-waiting Beatriz had been in her youth. It is said that because the queen envied her beauty, she went as far as imprisoning the future saint in a dungeon where the Mother of God with the Holy Child appeared to Beatriz. The Blessed Mother was dressed in a white habit and a scapular covered with a blue cloak. In the vision, Mary instructed Beatriz to found an order in honor of the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. Thirty years after being released from prison and the royal court, Beatriz fulfilled the task entrusted to her by founding the Order of the Immaculate Conception in Toledo with 12 pious women in 1484. During his visit to Rome in 1691, Father Stanislaus Papczyński asked this Order for incorporation. When he sought Papal approval for his congregation, his *Norma Vitae* was not accepted, and the Holy See ordered him to adopt one of the existing rules. He chose the rule of the Order of the Immaculate Conception with the hope that it would also be appropriate for his Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. That is why at the turn of March and April of 1691, he wrote a letter to the Order of Friars Minor,⁸⁷ which had jurisdiction over the Conceptionists, asking for permission to include the Marians in this order approved by the Holy See in 1511. Although the incorporation of the Marians into the Order of the Immaculate Conception never occurred, the convergence of the names, main goals, and habits of both orders, and finally, Father Stanislaus' personal engagement in pursuing the incorporation, allow us to suppose that the *Divina visio* which obligated him to found the Marian Congregation

⁸⁷ See Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 923–925.

of the Immaculate Conception could be very similar to the revelation St. Beatriz da Silva received. This *Divina visio* could be connected with the vision of Mary, who, during his imprisonment in Podoliniec and Prievidza, comforted and strengthened him, so that he could fulfill his vocation to be the Founder of the Order of the Immaculate Conception.

Similar events can be seen in the life of Blessed Pius IX (1792–1878), whom God’s Providence chose to declare the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary on December 8, 1854. The act ended the century-long dispute in the Church between the supporters (Immaculists) and the opponents (Maculists) of the doctrine of the Mother of God’s freedom from any stain of the original sin. But before the declaration, the Pope himself had to mature to this decision through personal suffering associated with the flight and exile from Rome to Gaeta and Naples on November 24, 1848. Pius IX was forced to leave his residence in the Roman Quirinal by the masonic-liberal forces then operating under the cause of the unification of the Italian nation. When he returned to the Eternal City on April 2, 1850, it was to serve the Church as the humble successor of St. Peter and the “prisoner of the Vatican,” no longer the ruler of the Papal State, the custom of his predecessors since the beginning of the 9th century. He never left the walls of the Vatican again until his death at 86. It was thus the “prison” from which he entrusted the future of the Church and the world to Virgin Mary, especially present in his history through the mystery of her Immaculate Conception.

While in exile in Gaeta, Pius IX often visited nearby Marian shrines, particularly a chapel called the Golden Cave dedicated to the Immaculate in the Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary’s Annunciation. From Gaeta, on February 2, 1849, he sent the encyclical *Ubi Primum* to the bishops of the whole world, asking them to express their opinion on the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. Was this decision a result of the Pope’s diplomatic and political efforts, who tried to maintain his power in Rome? Certainly not. Its underlying source was the Pope’s profound and very personal relationship with Mary, through whom he was healed from epilepsy in his young age, thus permitting him, with the special dispensation of Pope Pius VII, to be ordained to the priesthood. Or, perhaps was there something else? Could he also refer, like Father Papczyński, to *Divina visio*? We do not know. But hours of prayer during his exile in Gaeta were undoubtedly decisive. After his return to Rome, they resulted in the solemn declaration of the

apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, proclaiming the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the Basilica of St. Peter in the presence of more than 200 cardinals, archbishops, and bishops invited as the representatives of every country in the world.

When the Virgin Mary appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes as the Immaculate Conception four years later, the 14-year-old visionary was also facing difficult circumstances due to the poverty of her family of six. With her parents, who had lost their family mill, formerly their primary source of income, Bernadette and her three siblings lived in a cell of the former town prison called *Le Cachot* — the Dungeon.

It can therefore be concluded that the witnesses of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Christ, including Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, have always been required to experience rejection, the loss of something precious to them, and their external freedom, in order that they could become free enough from themselves to accept the free gift of grace from the Only True God, Who frees and comforts them like Mary and calls them to labor in His work with Mary.

In summary, *Divina visio* was a profound spiritual and mystical experience of God received by Father Stanislaus Papczyński, likely during his imprisonment in his last year with the Piarists. At the same time, the *Divina visio* was constant awareness of *the presence of* God, Who, as a Father, watches over the saints and wisely and lovingly “urges” them to do His work — work which always demands a gift of oneself.

2.2 *Oblatio*

A symbol and sign of such a *gift of self* which Father Stanislaus Papczyński made to God and Mary was undoubtedly the act of his self-offering (*Oblatio*), which he made on December 11, 1670, in the seat of the Piarists in Kazimierz near Kraków before Fr. Michał Kraus, the Vice-Provincial of the Piarists’ Polish Province. For Father Stanislaus, this act was the only answer possible to the gift of God’s revelation of Himself in the mystical event of *Divina visio*. For the Congregation of the Marian Fathers, the *Oblatio* is a founding and creative act with more charismatic than legal character and significance. Such is also the nature of *Divina visio* itself, engraved in the soul of the Father Founder. Therefore, since the *Divina visio* concerned the founding of the Congregation of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception of Most Blessed Virgin Mary by Father

Stanislaus, his act of *Oblatio* also had to include and declare this. Juxtaposing what the Father Founder says about his self-offering to God and Mary and the text of the act itself, it is easy to notice that these two events (*Divina visio* and *Oblatio*) should not be separated. As an integral whole, they constitute *the gift* and *the answer* to the gift. God reveals Himself to Father Stanislaus to comfort, strengthen, and call him to *accept* the gift that is Himself. Father Stanislaus, *endowed* with this gift, *responds* to it by offering himself completely to God and Mary Immaculate. Thus, at the very beginning, the essence of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, which the Marian Congregation is to venerate and spread, was expressed: the gratuitous *gift of the fullness of the Holy Spirit* and *Mary's answer to this gift*, given in the power of this Spirit.

In one of his most significant writings, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection* [*Fundatio Domus Recollectionis*], in which Father Founder describes the beginnings of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers, he seems to suggest this interpretation of these two charismatic events in his life. He inserts the text of the *Oblatio*, which occurred chronologically earlier, in *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, which was written and published later, in 1675, exactly where he speaks about the *Divina visio*. We can read his moving and expressive confession about the events of December 11, 1670, when he was officially released from the simple vows and the oath of perseverance in the Congregation of the Piarists:

Divine Majesty suggested to me, immediately before being released — such that, when I be released from them — that I freely bind, in the very same act, myself to God by other [vows], which I performed through the offering of myself [*Oblatio*], which I recited from my heart in public, although it was made in a rather quiet voice. The contents of this [*Oblatio*] are as follows:

I, Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, according to the flesh the son of Thomas from Podegrodzie, in the Diocese of Kraków, being 40 years of age, offer and consecrate to God the Father Almighty, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, and to the Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary conceived without the stain of original sin: my heart, my soul, intellect, memory, will, emotions, whole mind, whole spirit, interior and exterior senses, and my body, leaving absolutely nothing for myself, so that from

this moment forward I may be wholly the servant of this same Almighty God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Therefore, I promise that I will serve them chastely and zealously until the end of my life in this Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (which, by God's grace, I intend to found), and that I will adapt my way of life to its laws, statutes, and rules, and that I will never cause or permit, nor will I agree to it, even indirectly, that these things should in any way be removed, or changed, or dispensed with, except in grave and legitimate necessity. Moreover, I promise reasonably understood obedience to His Holiness, the Vicar of Jesus Christ and to his delegated power, as well as to all my mediate and immediate Superiors, and that I shall not possess anything privately, but will consider everything as common property. I confess that I believe everything which the holy Roman Church believes and everything that she will henceforth teach to be believed. Particularly, I confess in truth that Mary, the Most Holy Mother of God, was conceived without the stain of original sin, and I promise that I will promote and defend her honor even at the cost of my life. So help me God and this holy Gospel of God. At Kazimierz near Kraków, in the residence of the Clerics Regular of the Poor of the Mother of God of Pious Schools, in the presence of the most venerable Fr. Michael of the Visitation, the Vicar Provincial of the Polish Province, Fr. Joseph of the Mother of God, President of the above-mentioned residence, and the venerable clerics of lower orders — Casimir of the Angels and Bernard of the Lord's Passion, December 2 [11] 1670.⁸⁸

That same father, who granted me the release [from vows] in the name of the General, confirmed [this *Oblatio*] with the acclamation: May God confirm what He has wrought in you! Indeed, He did confirm it, for after I asked and [then] received from the Most Reverend Lord Vicar (the bishop of Kraków, Nicholas Oborski, a quite prudent man, who was already quite inclined to granting me help in the foundation of a new Congregation, but who later changed his opinion, for which reason I do not know) permission to wear the white habit. I already was to be dressed in it by a certain domestic episcopal prelate in the palace of this

⁸⁸ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *Self-Offering*, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 871–873.

same bishop, where I was, at that time, protected for reasons of security during the very Octave of the Immaculate Conception. But by divine dispensation, it happened that this matter was brought to nothing. I was summoned to Warsaw by my special protector, the Most Distinguished Lord, John Gembicki, at that time, bishop of Płock (later, of Kraków). Now he offered me the dignity of being a canon in the Płock Cathedral. I did not accept this on account of love for God and for promoting the glory of His Mother. Although — by doing this — I caused my protector to be gravely offended, for he greatly desired to have me — distinguished by this dignity — be joined to his closest associates. Nor was there a lack of venerable religious orders who invited me to their company. Of course, I was unwilling, as I desired greater perfection. For having disdained everything else and being prevented from returning to the Institute of Pious Schools, that divine vision, which had been engraved upon my soul regarding the foundation of this Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M., impelled me to this goal.⁸⁹

Thus, Father Stanislaus' *Oblatio*, seen as his *personal response* to the “urging call” of God’s love especially experienced in his most difficult moments, became an icon and symbol of his entire life and vocation to initiate a new religious congregation in the Church of God. Rescued from the waters of the Dunajec River while still in his mother’s womb, the future Founder of the Congregation dedicated to the Immaculate Conception was consecrated to God and Mary by his own mother, as mentioned earlier, to imitate Mary’s daily self-offering to the Lord and spirit of entrusting everything to Him. During his first religious profession in the Piarist Congregation, in the spirit of total self-offering and with the zeal proper to his young heart, he vowed:

I, Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, in the world [known as] Jan Papczyński, being 25 years of age, make my profession in the Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, and I profess to Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as to Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of God ... three simple vows: poverty, chastity, obedience

⁸⁹ Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 4–6, p. 902–904.

I desire that this profession and the vows, without regarding anything to the contrary which I now freely and entirely renounce, be always lasting, binding, and valid. In evidence of this, I give my signature on July 22, 1656, in Warsaw. In addition, I promise that I will never undertake any activity, nor will I attempt, nor for any reason will I agree to it, that the prescriptions regarding poverty in the Constitutions of our Congregation be modified, except, if for a worthy reason, it should seem that such poverty should be stricter and more severe. Beyond this, I promise that I will never undertake any activity, nor will I attempt, even indirectly, to be elected or elevated to the position as a Superior or any other dignity in the Congregation. I also promise that I will never seek any dignity or position as a Superior outside the Congregation, nor will I agree to it, except that I be forced by order of obedience through the one who could order me to do so under pain of sin. Lastly, if I were to find out that another is trying to attain one of the two things mentioned above, I promise that I will reveal that person and this entire matter to the Congregation or to the General Superior. I entrust my vows to the Lord before all His People ..., in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. I, Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, confirm all the above with my own handwritten signature.⁹⁰

The text of the first religious profession of the Founder of the Marianists can be seen as a kind of “footnote” to his *Oblatio* from 1670. Viewing it from this perspective can help us to better understand the difficulties he faced in his relations with some superiors of the Order of the Pious Schools. These superiors strove, in fact, for different offices and distinctions, the reason why they were admonished by Father Stanislaus, a faithful and zealous follower of St. Joseph Calasanz, the Founder of the Piarists. Moreover, the text of the first vows of Father Papczyński also shows his great zeal for upholding Calasanz’s ideal of poverty, which was often disregarded by many Piarists in that time. Because of these values, Father Stanislaus decided to also reject the ecclesiastical honors and dignities Bishop Gembicki offered him after he left the Order of the Pious Schools, which he himself mentions in the passage quoted above.

⁹⁰ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *Profession of Simple Vows*, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 854–856.

After making a total sacrifice of himself to God and the Church in the example of Christ Crucified and His Sorrowful Mother, Father Papczyński remained steadfastly aware of the validity of his *self-offering* even after his departure from the Piarists. He could not even imagine life outside of religious profession, which he had made once and for all, and which for him was indissoluble.⁹¹ Therefore, he bound himself with new vows, suggested to him by the “Divine Majesty” just before his legal release from the Piarist Order. This act of consecration was an expression of his deeply Christian and Marian *oblative spirituality* and a direct response to what God had accomplished in his heart through the event of *Divina visio*. The genuine Christian faith, of which the Virgin Mary is the Teacher and Mother, is the act of constant self-offering to God through Christ, with Christ and in Christ. It is an *oblatio* extended for one’s whole life. However, in the life of every true disciple of Christ, there are moments of God’s special appearance, Who lets a man experience His salvific presence. This experience transforms lives and gives them a new dimension and strength. These events strengthen, and sometimes completely redirect, what has already happened in man’s heart. For Mary, the Immaculate Virgin of Nazareth, the Annunciation was undoubtedly such an event, which revealed first of all to herself, her mystery of being the *full of grace* (cf. Lk 1:26–38). For Peter the Apostle, who denied his Master three times, the transforming experience was encountering the Risen One, Who asked him three times about love and called him again to follow Him (cf. Jn 21:15–19). For the Apostle of the Nations, it was certainly the vision of light and the voice of the Lord heard on the way to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1–19). A similar vision of light also happened to the great eulogist of the mystery of the Holy Spirit, the Byzantine mystic St. Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), who, teaching about God and His matters, spoke “not as the scribes” (Mk 1:22) but as someone who has experienced His transforming presence. That is why in the tradition of the Eastern Church, he is called the Theologian, alongside St. John the Evangelist and St. Gregory of Nazianzus.

Divina visio, which Father Stanislaus responded to with the act of his *Oblatio*, giving the charismatic foundation to the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception, is precisely such an event. This is *the new birth* of Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, in which he himself, no longer his mother, offers himself to the One who gave him a new life and vocation. On December 11, 1670, Father Stanislaus made an act of

⁹¹ Cf. Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 2, p. 901–902.

self-offering to the Triune God and the Virgin Mary “from his heart in public, although it was made in a rather quiet voice.” This act marked the beginning of a new chapter in his *oblative life*, which finally concluded with his profession of solemn religious vows on June 6, 1701. This profession occurred just before his death in the Order of the Immaculate Conception, after its approval by Pope Innocent XII. Saint Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary was the order’s lifelong Superior General, well as its Father and Founder. However, before this final profession could occur, Father Stanislaus’ life had to become as a *constant updating* of the act of *Oblatio*. He had to offer everything to God and the Virgin Mother conceived without the stain of original sin in a very concrete and clear way. The Paschal process of passing from possessing to offering, initiated many years earlier after the experience of “the Lvov Cross,” found its verbal and quasi-liturgical expression in the *Oblatio*, but it continued to manifest itself in the daily life of Father Stanislaus until his death — the final self-offering to the Eternal God. Contemplating the Crucified Orator, Father Papczyński participated in His suffering, following Mary Immaculate, through voluntarily “losing his life” (cf. Lk 9:24).

In overlooking such things as others’ opinion’s about him or his own honor — which Father Stanislaus despised⁹² — in rejecting the ecclesiastical distinctions and dignities mentioned above for the greater glory of God, and disregarding even his own health, which has always been most important for people of little faith, the Founder of Marian Fathers — as the true *Oblate of the Immaculate Conception* — was denying himself every day. He completely renounced the triumphalist vision of his Order,⁹³ and the privileges due to his age and position as the Founder.⁹⁴ He finally became so free from attachment to himself and his new vocation, that in

⁹² Cf. Papczyński, *Apologia*, p. 875.

⁹³ Father Papczyński, in his description of the difficult beginnings of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers which he founded, writes about the first two years spent in the Korabiew Forest. During this time, he consciously chose to act in accordance with Divine and human law when accepting candidates and establishing new foundations: “If I wanted, on the other hand, to not observe those things which ought to be observed while acting to found the Congregation, I would already — in these two years — have both a few houses and many companions.” Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 26, p. 913.

⁹⁴ “Father Stanislaus had an astonishingly low opinion of himself, despite being considered a saint by everyone during his lifetime. He referred to himself as a sinner and found joy in hearing slanderous remarks about himself. Even in his old age, he continued to set an example of humility by accepting menial tasks such as chopping wood for the kitchen, carrying it, firing up stoves, and digging canals and ponds near the Cenacle for the comfort of the convent in New Jerusalem. He wanted to imitate Mary, the Mother of God, who not only fulfilled spiritual works but also physical ones.” Wyszynski, *Żywot*, p. 92.

view of the increasing difficulties in the Congregation he had founded, he wrote a letter to the Superior General of the Piarists, asking for help in discerning whether it was really God's will for him to persevere on the way chosen on the day of the *Oblatio*.⁹⁵

The Paschal way of passing from *possessing to offering* everything to God and Mary reached one culmination when at the end of his life Father Stanislaus accepted being deprived even of his beloved *Norma Vitae* (*Rule of Life*), which had become in some way a symbol of his entire life after the *Oblatio*. In fact, when the Marian Order finally received papal approval in 1699, it was not based on the *Rule of Life* or *Constitutions* of the Founder but on the *Rule of Ten Evangelical Virtues of the BVM* obtained from the Franciscans Reformati (OFM) in Rome and brought by Fr. Joachim Kozłowski of St. Anna. The Marians accepted and promulgated it very quickly at the General Chapter on April 14, 1701.

Father Kozłowski, although chosen and promoted by Father Papczyński himself — when only a subdeacon he accompanied him on the trip to Rome in 1690–1691 to get papal approval for the Marian Order and later became his coadjutor and successor after being elected by the Chapter — did not follow his example. After the death of Father Papczyński, Kozłowski attempted to deprive him also of his proper title of “Father and Founder” of the Congregation by illegally assigning it to himself.⁹⁶ Even today, some members of the Marian Congregation are still doubtful and reluctant to accept and acknowledge St. Stanislaus Papczyński's undeniable fatherhood of the Marians. These doubts and reluctance, often resulting from culpable or excusable ignorance, need to be overcome. Therefore, it is important to know the person and work of the Father Founder on a deeper level in order to discover the abundance of the Holy Spirit's grace which was bestowed upon him that he might

⁹⁵ “The goal of this, my letter, is the following: that Your Fatherly Reverence, for my interior tranquility, stability, and salvation of my soul, having read (which I humbly ask you to do) this booklet of our *Norma Vitae*, would deign, as soon as possible, to clearly present to me your conviction, opinion, and will. Should I, as I swore, remain in this canonical status until the end of my life, as I belong to this [Congregation] now through this profession of mine (having already been released externally from the Institute of Pious Schools on the authority of the papal brief and having attained external release from the oath, etc.), for the glory of God, for the honor of the Virgin conceived without sin, for aiding the deceased deprived of the help of prayers and reparatory acts, or should I return to my first Institute of the Mother of God, which I particularly cherished, and which I [still] love and honor. What do some of our members of the Institute of Pious Schools advise me [to do]?” Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *Letter to Fr. Alexander Armini, SP, Superior General of the Order of Pious Schools*, of March 23, 1688, No. 7, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 917–918.

⁹⁶ Cf. Kosmowski, *Marianie 1671–1788*, p. 119.

become a witness to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. This mystery is not imposed upon anyone. Rather with love it “urges” those chosen by God not to remain idle in His Vineyard but instead eagerly proclaim the glory of this mystery and show its profound salvific meaning. To properly understand the Founder, we should go back to the source and return to the beginnings of this *Society of the Immaculate Conception*, which the Divine Spirit formed in the mind of the Founder and which he testified to by his self-offering to God and the Immaculate Virgin Mary on December 11, 1670, in Kazimierz near Kraków.

3. The Congregation of the Marian Fathers

The Religious Congregation of the Marians, founded by St. Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński, is primarily the Society or Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. The Founder clearly stated this fact in the preface to the *Norma Vitae* [*The Rule of Life*],⁹⁷ which he prescribed to the community he had founded. He also stated it at every possible occasion when he mentioned the name of the Community. In the oldest written document including the name of the Congregation, the *Oblatio* from December 11, 1670, Father Stanislaus declared a will and desire to found “the Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception.” Thirty years later, when he was preparing for his imminent passage to the Father’s House, he wrote quite strictly about his successor:

Father Joachim of St. Anna, elected as my coadjutor, by permission of the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Lord [Bishop] Administrator, I declare to be [my] successor as well, obliging his conscience, by the severe judgment of God, to be as strict as possible in ensuring that the religious Rule imprinted by God be observed. ... If Fr. Joachim, by consent of the fathers, be again confirmed as coadjutor, then I oblige him, by the awful judgment of God, that he would not innovate anything in regard to the habit I have prescribed, or to the name of the Order; nor may he dare to impiously abolish the veneration of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary which we — quite unworthy — offer to Her Majesty through the recitation of the small Office of the Immaculate

⁹⁷ See St. Stanislaus Papczyński, *Rule of Life* [*Norma Vitae*], No 1, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 53.

Conception and the entirety of the Rosary. Similarly, as to introducing the use of “burning alcohol” [vodka], let him be aware that this [drink] is forbidden to him and to all, because that drink, by the hidden mercy of God, is foreign to our Congregation.⁹⁸

Thus, it seems that for Father Stanislaus, the name of the Congregation, the white habit, the veneration of the Virgin Mary in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, as well as the inner and outer freedom from the worldly lifestyle symbolized by the “burning alcohol,” were inseparable from each other, according to the original vision of the congregation that God had formed in his soul. Over time, it became evident that this charism, which means a *supernatural gift from God freely given through the Holy Spirit*, bestowed upon the Father Founder of the Marian Congregation for the good of the Church and its renewal and growth, found its manifestation in singular concern for the salvation of others through the work of evangelization, especially among the poor and marginalized, as well as in the concrete assistance to the faithful departed. It is visible in the *Norma Vitae*,⁹⁹ which is the first *Constitutions* of the Marian Congregation, as well as in the evolving name of the community in which, three months before his passing to the Lord, the Father Founder made his solemn religious vows as “Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, unworthy Superior of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, a Polish Congregation, Helper of the Deceased and of Pastors.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the conclusion seems logical that promoting devotion to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, helping the faithful departed, and carrying out active apostolic works were closely related for Father Stanislaus. Father Andrzej Pakuła asks,

Maybe, since the original intention of Fr. Papczyński was spreading the devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Immaculately Conceived, those two other tasks appearing later — helping the deceased and pastoral activity — grow from the special devotion to Mary Immaculate and are a form of promoting this devotion and should be subordinated to it?¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Papczyński, *Second Testament*, No. 10 and 15, p. 937, 939.

⁹⁹ Papczyński, *The Rule of Life*, No. 2–3, p. 54–55.

¹⁰⁰ Papczyński, *Profession of Solemn Vows*, June 6, 1701, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 942.

¹⁰¹ Andrzej Pakuła, “Kult niepokalanego poczęcia NMP według o. Stanisława Papczyńskiego

The theology of the Paschal mystery, which does not separate the work of creation from salvation but reveals their inner unity and complementarity — as the Resurrection of the body results from the creative act of God and is the new creation — helps us to notice the profound theological connection of the main charism of the Marian Congregation, serving the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, with an active evangelical engagement and helping those who have already crossed the threshold of eternity but have not believed enough to accept the grace of the Risen One.

3.1 The Mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the Charism of the Marians

The incontestable fact that “the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary is the essence of the charism of the Congregation and has been, from the very beginning, a particular sign, strength, and joy of the Marian vocation”¹⁰² does not necessarily imply that every member of the Marian Congregation must be a specialist in the doctrine and theology of the Immaculate Conception in a speculative and academic sense. Saint Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary was not an expert himself, as he was called to live out this mystery, not to carry on intellectual discussions about it. Like many *immaculists* of his time, Father Stanislaus openly declared his readiness to shed his blood to defend the truth of the Immaculate Conception. We find a clear sign of this in the very act of the *Oblatio*, which paradigmatically shows the deepest sense of the charism of the Congregation: the self-offering of oneself to God with Mary for Christ and the Church (*Pro Christo et Ecclesia*). Since when still a novice Papczyński wanted to give his young life to defend the Catholic faith during the heretical Swedish Deluge, there is no doubt that as a mature religious man, he would not have hesitated to do the same if needed to protect the honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of Christ. But instead of a spectacular martyrdom in defense of the truth of the Immaculate Conception, the Lord called him rather to live this mystery and show its salvific sense to the Church. This

(1631–1701),” [The Devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Most BVM according to Fr. Stanislaus Papczyński], in *Salvatoris Mater* 6 no. 1 (2004): p. 53.

¹⁰² *Constitutions and Directory of the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary* (Rome: The General Curia of the Marian Fathers, 2018), No. 2.

is undoubtedly the vocation of all the Marians who repeat in their daily prayers the words sanctified by their oldest tradition: "May the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception be our salvation and our protection!" Describing the devotion of the Father Founder to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, the Venerable Servant of God Casimir Wyszyński wrote:

He always ended conversations with people by saying a short chaplet of the Immaculate Conception. With complete trust in the protection of the Immaculately Conceived Most Blessed Virgin Mary, he often recited this incredibly effective invocation: "May the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception be our salvation and our protection." He ordered everybody to recite it at the end of the rosary prayer and [at] thanks after meals in the refectory or other places.¹⁰³

Therefore, the charism of serving the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, from which the identity and mission of the Marian Congregation in the Church and the world arises, is neither *the fruit of an invention* or even a *prayer* of our Father Founder. It is not the result of his speculative theological reflection, nor the effect of his long pious and ascetic exercises. It comes as a very concrete gift from God's inspiration and as the fruit of *Divina visio*, the *experience of encountering* the Triune God, Who is the Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of vocation. As such, the charism of the Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception must have a character that is more existential and practical, rather than just speculative and devotional. It should be expressed above all in the concrete *lifestyle* consistent with the essence of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, which is *self-offering*. This charism has nothing to do with theological debates or pious practices, so popular in the times of Father Stanislaus as well as today.

Therefore, if we look at it in this way, it is not surprising that we do not find any theological or ascetical treatises in the writings of the Father Founder, nor lengthy considerations devoted to this subject, which seem crucial to him and the entire Marian Congregation. The most extensive statements of Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary about the Immaculate Conception, which however reference the topic almost incidentally, come

¹⁰³ Wyszyński, *Żywot*, p. 81.

mainly from his Piarist times when, still a zealous teacher of rhetoric, he tried to prove the validity of the immaculistic doctrine writing briefly,

[F]rom the consequences [*ex consequentiis*], it can be proved in the following epigram that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived without the original sin: “Who would dare, oh Virgin, to say that you’ve been touched by the original stain, Whose thoughts were not touched / by any evil inclination? You trampled the infernal serpent with your foot. He lost the last of his strength / when the labour started. Your spirit, led by love and not by the power of death, left Your Body by itself / it left the earth. The members of your body will forever remain unharmed. Already glorified / they shine in the won heaven. Untouched by any punishment for the original sin, who would dare to call you stained?”¹⁰⁴

This poetic epigram from 1663 is very similar to the previously cited short hymn, *Triumph of the Great Virgin Conceived without Sin*, “sung out” by Father Stanislaus to the Immaculate Virgin in Kraków in 1669 after reading an extensive immaculistic work of the Polish Franciscan Korwin Kochanowski. Both writings of Father Papczyński reveal the image of the Immaculate Virgin Mary trampling the head of the “Stygian serpent,” well known to all Marians due to the 18th-century painting by the Polish artist Franciszek Smuglewicz. In 1782, the Marians asked Franciszek Smuglewicz, then living in Rome, to paint this image of the Immaculate Conception. The painting was to be placed in the church of St. Vitus, near the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore which came under the ownership of the Marians on July 14, 1779, and where the original it is still displayed. It is hard to find a better and more vivid expression of Father Stanislaus’ understanding of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception: The Most Pure and Immaculate Virgin Mother, by the power of God, conquers Satan, the father of lies and pride! As if describing this very painting, which 100 years later his spiritual sons would have placed in the first church of their Congregation in Rome, the Father Founder wrote in his meditation to the religious for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception:

¹⁰⁴ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *Zwiastun Królowej Sztuk*, in *Pisma zebrane* (Warsaw: PROMIC Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów, 2016), p. 374.

Consider, that the Blessed Virgin came forth from the mouth of the Most High, that is, she was promised by an oracle of God even to our first parents, when He foretold that the fault, of which the woman was the culprit, would be blotted out by means of another, better woman. He said to the serpent: “I will put enmities between you and the woman ... she shall crush your head” (cf. Gen 3:15). Since that time when the divine command was broken in Paradise, all men became friends of the infernal serpent and, indeed, enemies of God. The Most Blessed Virgin alone was hostile to the devil from her very beginning since she was conceived without original sin. She, therefore, crushed the head of the serpent both at her beginning and when she gave birth to the Savior of the world. As for you, be on your guard lest you contract worse stains than the original stain if you make yourself a friend of the serpent; if, I say, you do not refuse conversing with the tempter of your soul and dwelling on sinful thoughts.¹⁰⁵

Mary, being not only Immaculate, but above all the Immaculate Conception itself — for by the power of the Holy Spirit she is fully united with her Son, the Savior of man and the world — comes, together with Him, to the aid of those who call upon her name while struggling against the “ancient serpent.” That is why Father Stanislaus, having deeply experienced such help, consolation, and support, cried out on the day of the Immaculate Conception:

Who, being oppressed by the burden of sins or worn out by a multitude of worries, would fear to approach today the most gracious Queen of Heaven? Behold, she extends her hands and calls out: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden” (Mt 11:28). She compares herself to a terebinth tree stretching out its branches that are indeed the branches of honor and grace, so that you may hasten to her with greatest trust, and she will obtain for you every kind of grace from God and the honor of eternal blessedness. For what would she not obtain from her Son for mankind, especially on this day; on which by a unique privilege she was exempted from the common lot of all men; on which she was conceived without the original sin; on which she was adorned and crowned with

¹⁰⁵ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary*, in *Examination of the Heart*, in Papczyński, *Selected Writings*, p. 451.

countless gifts of grace and raised entirely above all creation?¹⁰⁶

The theological image of the Woman of the Beginning and the End of salvation history — as seen in Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12 — engaged in a deadly battle against the dragon, the ancient serpent, “who is called the Devil and Satan” (Rev 12:9), sank deep into Father Papczyński’s heart and engraved itself on his soul. As he confessed in his *Oblatio*, it made him a “servant of the Almighty God and the Blessed Virgin,” fighting under the protection of her Immaculate Conception against the eternal enemy of “her offspring” (cf. Rev 12:17). The Marian invocation mentioned above should be read in this context: *Immaculata Virginis Mariae Conceptio sit nobis salus et protectio!* It translates, “May the Virgin Mary’s Immaculate Conception be our salvation and our protection!” In fact, it does not refer to health (as it used to be translated sometimes) but about eschatological salvation, of which the deepest sense is expressed precisely in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

Therefore, when leaving the Piarists, Father Stanislaus knew from God’s inspiration that he was to put on “the white habit in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Most B.V.M.”¹⁰⁷ and found the “Society of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception,”¹⁰⁸ whose members were to take an active part in the spiritual battle against the enemy of man’s eternal salvation, standing unequivocally on the side of the great Immaculate Virgin. As a sign of their identity, they were to wear

a habit stretching to the ankles — not one which trails on the ground or shows the ankles too much — and a short mantle reaching to the knees, and a shirt from coarse linen or some other harsh material. All of these will be white in color, in honor of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, and the greatest

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 450.

¹⁰⁷ Papczyński, *Second Testament*, p. 935. Although Father Stanislaus wanted to put on the habit on the day of the *Oblatio* or immediately after (in the octave of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in 1670), he confirmed in *The Foundation of the House of Recollection* (No. 5) that it was not until September 15, 1671, that he received the habit. This took place in Lubocz in the chapel of the residency of Karski family where he served as a chaplain and was seeking the first candidates for his Congregation. Father Stanislaus wrote: “with the knowledge of the holy Apostolic Nunciature, during the Octave of the Birth of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, I offered myself, already dressed in white, in perpetual service as a new candidate to this Mother.” Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 7, p. 904–905.

¹⁰⁸ Papczyński, *Self-Offering*, p. 872.

cleanliness of them should be observed, because dirty poverty can please no one.¹⁰⁹

The white purity of the Marian habit is not simply a question of standard hygiene, orderliness, and personal discipline but, first of all, *the sign of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception*, which shines with the whiteness of purity and the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit in the deadly fight with the powers of darkness symbolized by the serpent from the Genesis 3:15 and “a huge red dragon” from Revelation 12, who is finally conquered by Michael and his angels (cf. Rev 12:7–9).

In the context of the fight against evil and the triumph of the great Virgin Mary, we must consider Father Stanislaus’ special devotion to St. Michael the Archangel, whom he chose — as the Venerable Servant of God Fr. Casimir Wyszyński emphasizes — “for the main patron and protector of his Marian Congregation.”¹¹⁰ It is important to note that immediately after describing Father Stanislaus’ devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, his biographer, Fr. Wyszyński, moves to presenting his Founder’s devotion to St. Michael the Archangel and the other angels. Therefore, we can conclude that Father Papczyński manifested not only private devotion to St. Michael the Archangel, which was quite popular in Poland and probably also in his family, but above all a deeper understanding of St. Michael’s crucial role in combating the forces of evil. In fact, he himself engaged consciously and wholeheartedly in this battle, especially through the act of his *Oblatio*, standing steadfastly on the side of the Immaculate Conception, to the point of willingness to shed his blood and rejecting the honors or lucrative ecclesiastical positions offered to him by different bishops. Also, the fact that Father Stanislaus built the chapel of the Immaculate Conception and St. Michael the Archangel at the beginning of the foundation of the Marian Congregation in the Korabiew forest was not a coincidence or the result of his private piety.¹¹¹ This chapel was also in line with the logic of the mystery revealed to the Father Founder in *Divina visio*, whose theological meaning is shown in the passages referenced above from Genesis and Revelation.

Therefore, the Marians, like Mary the Immaculate Conception, are called to carry out a spiritual battle against mankind’s enemy for the sal-

¹⁰⁹ Papczyński, *The Rule of Life*, Chapter IV, No. 4, p. 66.

¹¹⁰ Wyszyński, *Żywot*, p. 81.

¹¹¹ Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 25, p. 913.

vation of every human who is the “mystical temple of God,”¹¹² even when this truth is forgotten. This battle consists in showing people of all times and cultures their dignity as children of God. This dignity originates from their creation by the Triune God in His own image as man and woman (male and female, cf. Gen 1:27) and their redemption by Him in the Crucified and Risen Christ, the Son of the living God. The salvation that they can and should experience already here on earth consists in concretely accepting the truth about their dignity as God’s children in a lifestyle consistent with the Gospel of Christ.

It is only when the Marians actively participate in the Church’s universal mission that they do not stand idle in the Lord’s vineyard, but faithfully fulfill their vocations of becoming servants and witnesses of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Lord’s Mother. The deepest meaning of this mystery is the truth about the salvation of man and the whole world in Christ Jesus. For this reason, Father Stanislaus was called to found a religious community, because the mystery of salvation, being of a strictly *personal* nature, is always *relational*. On the one hand, it always concerns man’s personal relationship with God. On the other hand, only in a community can its authenticity be revealed, because whoever does not love his brother whom he can see cannot love God whom he has not seen (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). Therefore, to authentically serve the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, Father Stanislaus could not stop at making his *Oblatio* and putting on a white habit. Following the *Divina visio*, he had to establish a fraternal religious community in which the mystery of the *gift of the relationship* of the Mother of God with the Persons of the Holy Trinity — and thus with every person open to the action of the Holy Spirit — would be practically expressed in *pietas*. This theological term does not primarily refer to *piety* associated with a specific form of devotion or prayer, but rather to a paternal, filial, and fraternal *love, friendship, and affection*¹¹³ that every authentic religious community must embody and which is particularly important for the Marian Congregation because of its charism.

Therefore, Father Papczyński founded the Marian Order to advance the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, that its members would know this mystery, bear witness to it, and *express it through brotherly love*. In

¹¹² St. Stanislaus’s work of this title, developed for several years, was published in Kraków in 1675.

¹¹³ Cf. <https://www.online-latin-dictionary.com/latin-english-dictionary.php?parola=pietas> (accessed: March 23, 2023)

this way, they would spread an authentic devotion to this mystery and show the victory of the great Virgin over the “ancient serpent,” who from the dawn of time has applied his principle of “divide and conquer or rule?” in the world. In this light, the fraternal, common life of the Marians lived in brotherly love would be the most important *sign of the mystery* of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. There is no doubt that the other *signs* mentioned above, such as the name of the Congregation, the white habit, the common and private recitation of the *Little Office of the Immaculate Conception* at the beginning each day, and the painting of Mary Immaculate from the church of St. Vitus, are very important and closely related to the *Divine vision* of the congregation the Holy Spirit shaped in the soul of Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary. However, the first place should be given to fraternal, mutual love. As a good doctor, he prescribed this “medicine” for the Congregation he had founded:

Concerning mutual love: let it be known that the one who excels in mutual love is dearer to the Divine Majesty. Each of you should keep in mind that the soul of this Institute is love, and to the extent that he withdraws from love, he withdraws from life. Therefore, even as he will promote the good, reputation, integrity, and holiness of the whole Congregation, so he will render to the individual members of this same Congregation all those things which he would wish for himself. And so, he will avoid these contagious diseases very opposed to love: envy, hatred, rancor, rivalry, suspicion, calumny, exclusive attachment, antipathy, jealousy, secret accusation, jeering, whispering, verbal abuse, annoyance, ambition, contempt for others, disturbances, agitations, quarrels, contentions. As he will watch over the tranquility of his own spirit, so the zealous guardian of love will also give great care to guard the tranquility of others and the whole house. He will suitably drive away any evil both from the whole Congregation and from each of its members. Call to mind the love of the early Church, about which the writer of the Acts of the Apostles says, “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (cf. Acts 4:32).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Papczyński, *The Rule of Life*, Chapter II, No. 4, p. 60.

3.2 Evangelization and Pastoral Work

[It is] the one that all the Orders have in common with you: the greater increase of God's glory, and care for your own salvation combined with serious striving for perfection. What does it profit a man, teaches the Savior, "if he gains the whole world, but suffers the loss of his own soul?" (cf. Mt 16:26) But lest you remain without work in the Vineyard of the Lord (cf. Mt 20:31), to the utmost of strength you will promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God.¹¹⁵

In these short and laconic words, the Father and Founder of the Marians solves the problem they struggled with from the very beginning of their existence: whether to adopt pastoral work modelled on the diocesan clergy or a more enclosed life typical for contemplative orders. The answer is not to choose either an active apostolate or enclosed contemplation, but both, each complementing the other. This, in fact, mirrors Mary's mystery of the Immaculate Conception, in which her profound experience of an *infusion of grace of the Holy Spirit*, "urged" her to leave her secure home in Nazareth and hasten to a town in the hill country (cf. Lk 1:39), to witness to the truth that God loved the world so much, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life (cf. Jn 3:16).

Thus, as the Annunciation revealed to Mary the revelation of her mystery of the *Fullness of Grace*, which was given to her not for her own sake but "for us men and for our salvation," so the profound spiritual encounter with God, which Father Papczyński calls *Divina visio*, "urged" not only him but also the Congregation he founded to actively proclaim the mystery of salvation, about which the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary speaks. For just as the "fullness of grace" is Mary's charism, which she fulfills by visiting Elizabeth and all those to whom "the Father of mercies" sends her, so the Marians are called to serve the mystery of her Immaculate Conception not for their own sake, but for the good of the Church and the salvation of the world. For this reason, they cannot stand idle in the Lord's Vineyard, but "to their utmost of strength [they must] promote devotion to the Immaculate Conception of Mary." They promote this devotion by being engaged in the work of evangelization

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Chapter I, No. 2, p. 58.

carried out by the Church and supporting the diocesan clergy, not by copying traditional ministry forms or searching for new ones, but rather through carrying out a *new quality* of apostolate in the Marian style. This style comes from their deep personal experience of encounter with the Paschal Lord, Who forgave Peter's betrayal and sent him to feed His sheep, only requiring from him a love greater than others (cf. Jn 21:15–19).

The Paschal experience made Peter *a new man*. He was no longer an ambitious fisherman from Galilee rebuking Jesus for speaking about suffering and the Cross: "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." (Mt 16:22). Instead he was a repentant disciple humbly confessing, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (Jn 21:17).

Thus, Father Stanislaus, "urged" by *Divina visio* not to remain idle in the Vineyard of the Lord, was also required to first pass through a similar Paschal experience (the Passover) and constantly become a new man, daily *offering himself* to the Suffering Christ and His Sorrowful Mother. Only then could he truly proclaim the mystery of God's love for man and the world, a mystery he proclaimed (cf. Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:16) when he

visited on foot parish churches to preach the Word of God and hear a confession of the faithful who poorly knew the Christian teaching. He preached to the ignorant, especially the poor, in a very accessible and engaging way. He ordered his followers to always fulfill this ministry in their churches and on missions. For almost 30 years, he was striving for the salvation of souls in [the] Kraków, Poznań, and Chełm dioceses in such an apostolic way. He carried out such an apostolate of proclaiming the word of God in Lewiczyn, New Jerusalem, Warsaw, and throughout the Duchy of Mazovia, where he was also regarded as the spiritual director. The Bishop of Poznań delegated him to conduct a visitation as a commissary of the whole Warsaw Archdeaconry, stretching for 50 miles. How much good he brought to souls thanks to the missions and works he undertook and how much hatred he staved off, only God knows.¹¹⁶

All this was possible, despite the eremitic restrictions imposed by Bishop Świąćicki on the first Marian community in the Korabiew

¹¹⁶ Wyszyński, *Żywot*, p. 74.

Forest,¹¹⁷ because the Divine vision engraved onto Father Stanislaus' soul concerning the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception he founded, compelled him to pursue its goal.¹¹⁸ This goal, however, was not an enclosed hermitage with hermits repenting for their sins, but rather a fraternal community of Marians who, experiencing God's salvation every day (cf. Acts 2:47), actively participate in the Church's work of evangelizing the world, a work which, despite 2000 years of history, is still new.

The term "new evangelization" coined by St. John Paul II does not mean searching for new methods of transmitting the Gospel, as if it were a marketing or media campaign. Rather, this concept calls for a *return to the sources of evangelization*, especially to *the Source*, which is the Lord Jesus Christ Crucified and Risen, in order to renew the mission of spreading the Gospel throughout the world after drawing from that Source of Living Water. In our time, returning to the Source is made more urgent and necessary by the crisis of faith that affects the Church herself and many of her representatives, which Benedict XVI openly spoke about many years ago.¹¹⁹ For this reason, he announced the Year of Faith and convened the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops focused on *the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian Faith*.

Thus, the new evangelization, which the Congregation of Marian Fathers should be actively involved in due to its charism, constitutes a real return to Christ and a call to *meet* Him as a living Person.¹²⁰ Only then will it be possible to authentically bear witness to the Good News about the

¹¹⁷ "On October 24, 1673, ... Bishop Stanislaus Jacek Świącicki arrived unexpectedly at the Korabiew Forest on the request of his Ordinary, Bishop Stefan Wierzbowski, to conduct a visitation of the Korabiew hermitage. ... After arriving at the Forest, Bishop Świącicki blessed the hermitage and approved the Marian Institute. However, he decided that Krajewski, the founder of the hermitage, and his hermits should be removed. Upon the request of Father Papczyński, he agreed to let them stay and test them. For this purpose, he ordered the hermits to observe *The Rule of Life* written by Father Stanislaus for future Marians. He set standards specified in regulations and statutes that they were to comply with under oath. They were required to observe a strict fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, complete silence on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, public whipping daily, and prohibition to go beyond the enclosure. The rule established by the bishop for the new congregation emphasized very harsh penance and obliged the hermits to carry out continuous retreats." Kosmowski, *Marianie 1671–1788*, p. 42).

¹¹⁸ Cf. Papczyński, *The Foundation of the House of Recollection*, No. 6.

¹¹⁹ Benedict XVI, "Un modo nuovo di essere Cristiani," the address to the members of the Roman Curia on the occasion of making Christmas wishes, December 22, 2011, in *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, vol. VII/2 (luglio-dicembre 2011) (Città del Vaticano: LEV, 2012), p. 951.

¹²⁰ "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, No. 1, Rome, December 25, 2005.

Son of God, firstly with one's own life and secondarily with words or any other way. All modern forms of proclaiming the Gospel through media will be worthless if the evangelizer is himself not evangelized or if there has not been an authentic encounter with God's love in his own life, a love that forgives, comforts, and calls, showing a new horizon of life. Only then does a baptized person become a true Christian, free from an isolated conscience, proud self-reliance, and an all-consuming focus on himself.

The Blessed Virgin Mary also experienced the transforming Source of Love and Love itself at the beginning of her life. That is why she is an authentic *Way and Star of the New Evangelization*. Father Stanislaus also entered upon this way when, after a true encounter with the Triune God in *Divina visio*, he offered himself entirely to God and to Mary, who guided him like a star on this new road. In this way, he initiated the apostolic Congregation of the Marian Fathers, which, although founded at the beginning "in the eremitical status," was meant to assist not only to the souls in Purgatory, but also parish priests. This mission resounded clearly even in the name of the Order given to the Congregation at the end of the Founder's life. For this reason, although under the circumstances he had to accept an eremitic *status quo* for his community, he never relinquished the vision of his congregation which God had imprinted on his heart. That is why he wrote to the first Marians in the *Norma Vitae*:

Since the contemplative life is not binding you so strictly, although you are founded in the eremitical status, those gifted with such talents will not be prevented from humbly helping pastors in their church work, if they would be called upon by pastors, and have previously obtained faculties from the Ordinaries and the Superiors.¹²¹

The Marians' active participation in the Church's evangelization completed through parish ministry or missionary work is not a separate charism of the Congregation. Instead, it is an external expression of its original charism of serving the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. As such, it cannot be treated as of secondary importance, or as an addition to the main charism of the Marians. In fact, the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary and evangelization are closely connected. The Marians are called to fulfill their vocation by showing this connection practically and concretely.

¹²¹ Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, *The Rule of Life*, Chapter I, No. 3, p. 57.

In reality, their vocation consists in demonstrating the Marian character of the mystery of the Church, a truth often forgotten in today's ecclesiastical circles which are dominated by the secularized way of thinking that mainly involves worldly planning, action, and success.

For this reason, many years ago Joseph Ratzinger warned against understanding the Church as a religious and social organization which can be programmed and reformed according to a fixed plan. The truth is completely different. Instead of an organization the Church is a living organism, the Mystical Body of Christ, His Bride, the mystery of Mary "holy and immaculate" (cf. Eph 5:27), redeemed and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. Meanwhile

in today's intellectual climate, only the masculine principle counts. And that means doing, achieving results, actively planning, and producing the world oneself, refusing to wait for anything upon which one would thereby become dependent, and relying rather, solely on one's own abilities. It is, I believe, no coincidence, given our Western, masculine mentality, that we have increasingly separated Christ from his Mother, without grasping that Mary's motherhood might have some significance for theology and faith. This attitude characterizes our whole approach to the Church. We treat the Church almost like some technological device that we plan and make with enormous cleverness and expenditure of energy. Then we are surprised when we experience the truth of what Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Monfort once remarked, paraphrasing the words of the prophet Haggai, when he said, "You do much but nothing comes of it" (Hag 1:6)! ... What we need, then, is to abandon this one-sided, Western activist outlook, lest we degrade the Church to a product of our creation and design. The Church is not a manufactured item; she is, rather, the living seed of God that must be allowed to grow and ripen. This is why the Church needs the Marian mystery. There can be fruitfulness in the Church only when she has this character.¹²²

Saint Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary was called to found the Congregation of the Marian Fathers to proclaim the unity of creation and redemption in the Church and the world, where the Son is often separated

¹²² Ratzinger, *My Word Shall Not Return to Me Empty!*, p. 16–17.

from the Mother, and the masculine element is isolated from the feminine. Recently, they are often opposed to each other, and even their natural mutual difference with its simultaneous complementarity is denied and depicted as evil. In such a world, the Marians are to proclaim the perfection of God's creation and the victory of His redemption in Christ Jesus, true God and true Man. They must carry out this proclamation through the simple signs of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, of which the most important is love.

3.3 Helping the Faithful Departed

Proclaiming the Good News about every person's salvation in Christ, of which the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is the summary and symbol, extends beyond the earth and does not end with what is commonly called death, but in fact is only the separation of the temporal from the eternal. "Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended!" Thus, just as the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary finds its conclusion and fulfillment in her Assumption into Heaven, so too, the Church's work of evangelization embraces human existence in its whole integrity, from creation to the Resurrection in Christ. Therefore, since the Risen Christ Himself descended into Hell to proclaim salvation to those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, as Church Tradition teaches (especially in 1 Pet 3:18–20; 4:5–6 and Eastern iconography), the Church, being His Mystical Body, continually descends there to aid those who, due to insufficient faith and love during their lifetime on earth, cannot yet open themselves to God Who is Love, although they have already crossed the threshold of eternity, as has already been discussed in Chapter 1.

Because Father Stanislaus Papczyński personally experienced the purifying encounter with the Paschal Lord during his earthly life, he became a merciful and compassionate helper of those whose time on earth was too short to obtain such a grace. Although, following the tradition of his time, such expressions as the *punishments of Purgatory* can be found in the writings of Father Stanislaus, this terminology should be attributed to the imperfections of the language of juridical theology prevailing then (as has been shown in Chapter 1 of this book), rather than to the essential truth of the mystery of Divine Mercy contained in the term Purgatory. In fact, perhaps too preoccupied with the primacy of God's justice, juridical

theology has often neglected to show His infinite mercy. Mercy, however, triumphs over judgement (cf. Jas 2:13). Father Stanislaus was particularly sensitive to the image of the Merciful God Whose grace he had experienced himself. That is why in his Sunday meditations for the whole liturgical year he wrote:

Lord, You are my Savior, who long awaits my conversion, which I — a vile servant and fugitive — still delay. You, Lord, are the One who most justly could [have] thrust me innumerable times into hell because of my evil deeds, but You have waited for me to return to my senses. It is You, prompted by mercy alone, who — upon seeing me fouled by innumerable and most abominable stains of wicked deeds — have called me to this sacred bath of Your Most Precious Blood in order to wash me. Behold I come, having converted in spirit and already knowing my illness, which is a very dangerous leprosy and severe consumption of vices and tepidity. Here I am, standing at the gate of the holy and salutary bath; I knock and most humbly urge You, Most Merciful Jesus, to wash away all the filth of my soul. Once washed and purified, I will throw myself into Your embrace and will offer sweet thanksgiving. Having received the Most Sacred Eucharist and resting in the bosom of Your guidance and love, I will sing: O Lord, “My soul clings to [Y]ou; [Y]our right hand upholds me.” (Ps 63:8).¹²³

Father Stanislaus’ sensitivity to the deplorable situation of sinners, especially those who, as victims of wars, plagues, or miserable poverty, left this world suddenly and unprepared, resulted from his deep, personal experience of suffering and the aid he received from the Merciful God. Already since the times of the “Lvov Cross” — as Fr. Casimir Wyszyński pointed clearly out — God did not spare his servant painful experiences, testing him like gold in the furnace.

Thus the most gracious and merciful God directed and prepared the young man to be the Founder of the Institute bringing help to those suffering in Purgatory. Through enduring patience and personal trials, God was preparing the future helper to

¹²³ Papczyński, *Examination of the Heart*, Part 1, p. 124.

develop empathy for souls experiencing intense suffering and to love them more deeply through his own experience of pain and compassion.¹²⁴

That is the key to interpret many difficult events in the later life of Father Papczyński, particularly the imprisonment by his confreres in Podoliniec and Priewidza. All these trials should be seen as preparation for fulfilling the mission entrusted to him by God: founding the Congregation of Marian Fathers, who are called to live the charism of serving the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church through active participation in the evangelization of the living and those who have departed to eternity, but not yet obtained the full *encounter* with the Risen Christ.

Thus, on the one hand, the Marians are called to show the Marian character of the Church, and, on the other hand, they must perceive and announce her eschatological and paschal nature, what is generally called helping the deceased or caring for the departed. If it were only a question of respecting the memory of those who have passed away, the Congregation of Marian Fathers would not be contributing anything new. Remembrance, or even reverence, for the departed exists everywhere, especially in old, sometimes called primitive, cultures. The Africans or Asians care for their deceased much more than people of Western cultures, having a sense of constant contact with them. It is true that Christians pray first of all for salvation of their departed. However, long before Jesus Christ, Judas Maccabeus did the same, collecting money after one of his battles and sending it to Jerusalem that prayers and sacrifices could be made for the Jews who fell in the fight after having sinned by breaking the commandments of the Lord. "In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way," acknowledged the inspired author, "inasmuch as he had the Resurrection in mind. For if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead." Thus, "he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be absolved from their sin" (2 Macc 12:43–45).

However, the memory and care shown to the faithful departed in the tradition of the Marian Fathers, resulting from the charism of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, not from mere religious or cultural customs, must involve more than regular prayers for

¹²⁴ Wyszyński, *Żywot*, p. 62.

the dead or even practical assistance of the dying. In fact, it is more about the *Paschal lifestyle* than about the *Officium Defunctorum*, which in no way can be underestimated. However it is also not enough to stop there. Therefore, without neglecting prayer for the dead, especially liturgical prayer, we must remember that our life is changed, but not ended.

Therefore, due to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, the Marians, more than others, are to strive for *freedom from themselves* and freedom from the fear of *death* in all dimensions of their lives. Satan, whose head is crushed by the victorious foot of the great Virgin Mary, holds power over death precisely through this fear (cf. Heb 2:14), convincing people of little faith that all life ends with death. In reality, biological death is only a passage to the reality beyond time and space. Whether it will be reality of eternal life in union with God through Christ and in Christ or the reality of eternal death, depends on the faith of every person. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned (cf. Mk 16:16). Jesus Christ overcame death and Satan through His own death and Resurrection. Those who belong to Him can and should illustrate this triumph by dying to themselves every day, thus crushing the head of the ancient serpent, as Mary did in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception.

This is *the Paschal lifestyle* which we learn from Father Stanislaus. *This lifestyle*, consisting of self-denial, taking the last place, and renouncing one's ambitions and self-fulfillment in the name of the love of God and the Immaculate, is a life-and-death spiritual battle against the enemy of eternal salvation. Finally, it is a *self-offering* to God and a rejection of the lifestyle of this world, which, together with its false attractiveness, passes away.

Such a way of life is Mary's lifestyle and should be acknowledged and accepted by those who often sing: "*Mariani, qui vocamur, nos libenter gloriamur, Tuo sancto nomine.*" Desiring such a life, which consists of daily self-offering and self-denial, is undoubtedly the fruit of the grace of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Spirit is the power of God's begetting that consists in dying to Himself. He is God's personal humility, His love, and thus His very essence and nature.

Hence, it was necessary for Father Stanislaus Papczyński to suffer much from his earliest years to be able to live out the mystery of the Holy Spirit, Who filled the Virgin of Nazareth from the very beginning of her existence and made her *the created Immaculate Conception*. If, therefore, this mystery of the Virgin Mother, proclaimed by the Church as dogma

in 1854 and completed by the events of Lourdes in 1858, speaks about Mary's experience of God's transforming and sanctifying love, which is the Holy Spirit, those whom God calls to serve this mystery must also have *experiential knowledge* of it, not only intellectual knowledge gained from theology textbooks.

This experience is always associated with suffering. "My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials." (Sir 2:1).

On the day of the Annunciation, Mary learned about God's special love for her and, consequently, about her special election. Then she experienced its effects in all the difficult moments of her life until the Cross and tomb of the Son, as the *Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of Mary* teaches us with eloquent simplicity. Her constant acceptance of all the sorrowful mysteries of life revealed the grace of her Immaculate Conception more and more. This culminated in her presence at the Cross of Jesus (cf. Jn 19:25–27) and certainly at His tomb, where the road led only to the Resurrection. Because she accepted the gift of the Holy Spirit ever day, Who was given to her more and more from the very beginning of her existence, she became not only the Mother of Jesus, but of all those who believe in Him, bringing them consolation and support in all their needs.

Similarly, when, following the example of Jesus and Mary, Father Stanislaus accepted "the Lvov Cross," and all his other difficult experiences, he received *a new heart* capable of loving to the extent of the Master Himself and His Mother. Thus, he became "the creator of help needed by the deceased," as his biographer Fr. Casimir Wyszzyński noted. However, he never forgot that the inspiration for this help did not come from his fragile human compassion or even mystical visions of Purgatory, but from the mystery of Mary — her *Paschal lifestyle*, her Immaculate Conception. He became a servant of this mystery by offering himself to the Triune God and to Mary, as a true God's Mystical Temple. Thus, he prayed fervently on the day of Mary's Nativity, calling her the Refuge of Sinners:

O my soul! I do not know where you shall direct your joy: whether to the future Mother of God born today? Or to the future Savior still awaited? Choose the former; and, joining the angels and the newborn Virgin in the cradle, compose a grateful song for her on the day of her birth and say: Hail, Morning Star, most bright forerunner of the eternal day! Hail, most brilliant Moon, which illuminates the long night. Hail Mary, the greatest adornment

of the heavens and the earth, you shall bear the true Savior! In addition to other titles, I greet you with the title of the Refuge of sinners. O what a great number of sinners await you, the city of refuge, you who are to preserve them from eternal death! Among them I, the first of all, fly to you.¹²⁵

Therefore, as active participation in the Church's work of evangelization is the fruit of the Father Founder *experiencing* Mary's mystery of the Immaculate Conception in her triumph over Satan's pride and envy, as well as the love and consolation resulting from this victory, helping the deceased is not an expression of simple human respect and reverence, common for every culture and nation, but rather the sign of true Christian faith and love. This care for the departed originates in Father Stanislaus' *experience* of the Paschal Christ's real presence, Who, having risen from the dead, dies no more (cf. Rom 6:9), but also never leaves the mystery of His death. In fact, this Risen Lord appears to His disciples as the Lamb slain, with mortal wounds in His side, hands, and feet (cf. Jn 20:19–28), allowing them to recognize Him and experience His *presence* in the Sacraments of the Church, especially Baptism and the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, which restores the grace of Baptism. After truly experiencing this salvific presence of the Lord, the disciples proclaim the Gospel to all creation (cf. Mk 16:15), bearing witness to the truth that life changes but does not end.

Thus, the charism of serving the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, which finds its completion in her Assumption into Heaven, calls us to a deeper understanding of the Church's faith in the Resurrection of Christ. We do not speak here about a catechism-style knowledge of faith, which is important, even indispensable, for priests and religious. Certainly, deepening our faith does not consist in searching for spectacular experiences often found in so-called "charismatic movements," which are identified as signs of the presence of the Risen One. We need *a renewal* and an authentic experience of *the true relationship* with the Risen Lord, often encountered for the first time, Who will make us witnesses of His love if we truly desire and seek it. An authentic encounter with Christ as "our Passover" always manifests in our desire to share with others how we have met Him and recount what He has done in our life. That's what evangelization is. We must express the authenticity of our experience of

¹²⁵ Papczyński, *Examination of the Heart*, Part 2, p. 417.

Christ, living in the mystery of His death, through acts of fraternal love and care, especially for those who need us most. This means first of all those who have crossed the threshold of eternity but “were halted at the moment which is not an earthly life anymore, but it is not fully entering the Kingdom, either. These souls need additional grace and cleansing, which can only be completed through God’s free mercy.”¹²⁶

Aware of this, Father Stanislaus Papczyński “ordered all the friars in the Congregation to recite the office and the rosary for the dead every day. He also encouraged them to offer all their merits, chores, fasts, mortifications, and other pious spiritual exercises for freeing the departed from unbearable suffering.”¹²⁷ In his *Rule of Life*, he wrote that the Marians are to “assist the souls of the faithful departed with utmost zeal, piety, and fervor.”¹²⁸

Death is, therefore, the *last chance* people receive to freely subject themselves to God. Only in this subjection can He make them “a new creation.” If a soul rejects this opportunity, there will be nothing left. Nevertheless, the choice exists until the end. Therefore, the Marians are called to help those dying in the Lord and those already departed, make the choice to trust God’s mercy at the hour of their passing from this world to the Father’s House. Hence, if we view death with the eyes of faith through Christ, it is a blessing, not a curse. For as all die in Adam, so in Christ, all will be brought to life (cf. 1 Cor 15:22). This is the Good News resulting from the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of Christ, the New Eve and the Daughter of Her Son.

¹²⁶ Durrwell, *Chrystus, człowiek i śmierć*, 65.

¹²⁷ Wyszyński, *Żywot*, p. 83.

¹²⁸ Papczyński, *The Rule of Life*, No. 2, p. 56–57.

About the Author



Father Bogusław Janusz Gil, MIC, a Marian missionary, has been working in Vietnam since 2015. He completed his philosophical-theological studies at the Catholic University of Lublin in 2000, defending his master's thesis on "Deification (theosis) in the Writings of St. Symeon

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In 2014, Fr. Bogusław obtained a doctorate in dogmatic theology with a specialization in Mariology writing a dissertation titled "*Maria, immacolata e assunta nell'evento e nella prospettiva del 'dono'. Dimensione culturale e teologica*" ("Mary, immaculate and assumed in the event and in the perspective of the 'gift'. Cultural and theological dimension"). His dissertation was published by the Italian publishing house Aracne in 2016. He is the author of scholarly works on Mariology, mainly focusing on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. In 2021, he edited the Vietnamese translation of Kazimierz Krzyżanowski's book about Father Stanisław Papczyński, titled *Dưới tà áo của Đấng Vô Nhiễm* (*Under the Mantle of the Immaculate Conception*). His most recent book is a theological interpretation of the life and work of St. Stanisław Papczyński in the light of contemporary theology of the Paschal Mystery.



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The *personal relationship* between Christ and His Mother, which is the Mystery of the Holy Spirit as the uncreated Divine Immaculate Conception and God's power of begetting the Son by the Father, has assisted me, if I may say so, to comprehend the person and vocation of St. Stanislaus Papczyński, whom God's Providence has given us as a witness and a sign of this mystery.

The key, I believe, lies in our Father Founder's references to Jesus and Mary in the name he chose at the beginning of his religious life. The name *Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary* expressed the vocation he would fulfill by founding our Congregation at the time God determined.

SGNM 07270314



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ISBN 978-1-59614-611-2



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