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# *Quærens*

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As a journal of theology and pastoral life, *Quaerens* is committed to the noble mission of deepening the modern-day Christian’s understanding and praxis of the faith, of fostering an atmosphere of dialogue with cultures and religions throughout the world in general and throughout Asia in particular, and of promoting a scholarly theological discourse that addresses the specific pastoral needs and questions of our time.

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### **Administration**

Research, Planning and Development Office  
Recoletos School of Theology, Inc.  
81 Alondras St. Miranila Homes, Congressional Avenue Ext.  
1101 Quezon City, Philippines  
(email: [quaerens@sscrmn1.edu.ph](mailto:quaerens@sscrmn1.edu.ph))

All business and editorial correspondence (e.g. matters concerning manuscripts, books for reviews, advertising and subscriptions) should be addressed to:

*Quaerens*  
Journal of Theology and Pastoral Life  
Recoletos School of Theology, Inc.  
81 Alondras St. Miranila Homes, Congressional Ave. Ext.  
U.P. P.O. Box 206, U.P. Diliman  
1101 Quezon City, Philippines

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# The Christological Hermeneutics of Augustine in Benedict XVI's Mind

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Rev. Fr. Radni Caparas, O.A.R., S.Th.D

## Abstract

*This study attempts to explore the Christological hermeneutics of Augustine in Benedict XVI's method of reading Christ. Benedict XVI stressed that Augustine's method of knowing Christ boils down to the personalization of faith in Christ. It is a form of divinization or Christification. The quest for Christ should answer the question on how one should assimilate Christ and not just focus on scrutinizing and dissecting the faith. In the thought of Benedict XVI, the Augustinian maxim *Crede ut Intelligas* Is 7:9 (LXX), though ancient, is still a valuable method in the quest for Christ. Those who explore the world of the Son of God should be well grounded in the ecclesial faith since the Church provides a true image of Christ in the process of knowing Christ. The Augustinian Christological hermeneutics calls for a series of unities such as, faith and reason, faith and history, Bible and Church, Christology and Soteriology, for a comprehensive and convincing presentation of the image of Christ. Benedict XVI reiterated Augustine's interplay of faith and reason, theology and spirituality, the search*

*for Christ in the Church, prayer and liturgy, faith and love, and material and spiritual in the quest for the real Jesus.*

*The study is divided into three parts. The first part explores the Christological issues and methods since Vatican II. The pluriformity of Christological methods is a main issue in the development in Christology. The proliferation of the Christological hermeneutics ignited the Church (Dei Verbum and Pontifical Biblical Commission) to set some guidelines and controls in order to pave the way to a better quest for the real Jesus. Within this context, Benedict XVI proposed a Christological hermeneutics which present a convincing figure of the real Jesus of Nazareth. The second part of the dissertation deals with the commonalities and distinction of the hermeneutics of Augustine and of Benedict XVI. It highlights the similarities of the theological context of both theologians. Likewise, it presents the continuity of the thought of Augustine and Benedict XVI. The last part explains the Christological Hermeneutics of Augustine in the mind of Benedict XVI. It investigates and defines the Augustinian method of knowing Christ within the framework of Benedict XVI's personal quest for Christ.*

(Key Words: Christological Hermeneutics, Method, Rule of Faith, Rule of Love, Reason, Faith, Augustine, Benedict XVI, Communion, Ecclesial, Body, Quest, Hermeneutics)

## **Introduction**

In the writings of Benedict XVI, Augustine's thought is ubiquitous. Augustine has great influence on Benedict XVI as a theologian and a pastor. What could be Augustine's contribution to the personal search of Benedict XVI for the face of Christ? In this study the Augustinian method of knowing Christ will be given emphasis. Augustine's hermeneutics is a path to the enrichment of one's faith in Christ. His Christological hermeneutics produces a gallery of inspiring portraits of Christ.

Augustine did not write a theological treatise on Christ like St. Athanasius or St. Leo. Scholars on Augustine wrote his Christology from varied standpoints. They examine Christ from the teachings of Augustine on the Incarnation, Ascension, Resurrection of the Body in general,

exegesis, Passion of Christ, *Totus Christus*, Trinity, and Christological questions.<sup>1</sup> The examination of Augustine's Christology was taken from his opus like the *City of God*, *De Trinitate*, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, *Sermons* and so on. Among the following studies on the Christology of Augustine are: M. William, *The Ascension of Christ in the Works of Augustine*, 1967; Babcock, William, *The Christ of the Exchange: A Study in the Christology of Augustine's Ennarationes in Psalmos*, 1971; McWilliam Dewart, *The Christology in the Pelagian Contrvrsy*, 1982; Madec Goulven, *La Patria e la Via: Cristo nella Vita e nel Pensiero di Sant'Agostino*, 1993; Studer, Basil, *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine of Hippo: Christocentrism or Theocentrism?*, trans. O Connel, 1997<sup>2</sup>; Toom, Tarmo. *Thought Clothed with Sound: Augustine's Christological Hermeneutics in De Doctrina Christiana*, 2001; Dodaro, Robert, *De Civitate Dei: Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*, 2004; Keech, Dominic, *The Anti-Pelagian Christology of Augustine of Hippo, 396-430*, 2012; Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis*, 2012; R. Rombs, "Augustine on Christ," in *T&T Clark Companion to Augustine*. eds. C.C. Pecknold and Tarmo Toom, 2013; Gerald O'Collins, *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ: Teaching, Rhetoric, and Reception*, 2017.

There were Augustinian Christological studies written within the frame of thought of Benedict XVI. Patrick Fletcher, *Resurrection Realism: Ratzinger the Augustinian*, 2014. Flechter focused on Augustine's resurrection of the body in general assimilated and developed by Benedict XVI. Cyril Oregan, "Benedict the Augustinian," in John C. Cavadini, ed. *Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI*, 2012. Oregan covered some dominant theological themes repeated by Benedict XVI in the thought of Augustine, namely; Eschatology, the relationship of faith and reason, the relationship of faith and culture, biblical exegesis and the relationship of prayer and liturgy.

The study falls under this category. It identifies the Christological hermeneutics of Augustine appropriated by Benedict XVI. This study aims to identify the Augustinian Christological Hermeneutics that was appropriated by Benedict XVI in knowing and presenting Jesus of Nazareth to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald O'Collins, SJ., *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ: Teaching, Rhetoric, and Reception*, 2017, 5.

<sup>2</sup>See, Dominic Keech, *The Anti-Pelagian Christology of Augustine of Hippo, 396-430*. UK: Oxford University Press, 2012, 12-14.

The research attempts to answer the question about the Christological hermeneutics of Augustine in Benedict XVI's method of reading Christ in his writings by first considering Augustine's Christological hermeneutics, noting its key principles and characteristics. This allows a concrete exploration of the Augustinian search for Christ from Benedict XVI's standpoint. This way, the study determines not only whether he, captured certain elements of the Augustinian method of reading Christ but also developed the thought of Augustine's key principles and characteristics regarding the quest for Christ. Hence, it determines if the Augustinian method of quest for Christ was static or not in the thought of Benedict XVI.

### Augustine's Quest for Christ: A Spiritual Method

Benedict XVI first came across the writings of Augustine in 1946. The beauty of Augustine's realistic personal struggles captivated him. He admitted that reading some books of Augustine was like conversing with him.<sup>3</sup> His encounter with the thought of Augustine was a spiritual experience that left an essential mark on him. The *Confessions of Augustine* struck him with the power of all his human passion and depth.<sup>4</sup> After 23 years, Benedict started to develop his theology in dialogue with Augustine. Benedict XVI saw in Augustine neither an intellectual giant who wrote huge theological treatises nor a man of the past whose faith is no longer needed. He said that:

when I read St. Augustine's writings I do not get the impression that he is a man who died more or less sixteen hundred years ago; I feel he is like a man of today: a friend, a contemporary who speaks to me, who speaks to us with his fresh and timely faith. St. Augustine talks to me in his writings, we see the everlasting timeliness of his faith; of the faith that comes from Christ, the Eternal Incarnate Word, Son of God and Son of Man.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, with Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*. Translated by Jacob Philips, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016. Kindle Edition, 79.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998, 4; Benedict XVI, with Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, 79; Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Fletcher, *Resurrection Realism: Ratzinger the Augustinian*, Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014, (Kindle Locations 93-97); Benedict XVI. *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine*



Benedict XVI sees in Augustine's life a way to enrich one's faith in Christ. He saw in Augustine's conversion the assimilation of faith in Christ. The appropriation of the Christian faith by Augustine is a model to contemporary human beings in assimilating faith in Christ. Benedict XVI sees in the life of Augustine the passionate search for the real face of Christ.

Benedict XVI believes that Augustine, who put into life the Christian faith, mirrors Christ. As Markus Bockmuehl says, the role of the saint's lives as expositions of scriptures works only in as much as these lives are transparent to the Christ who both teaches and embodies the text at hand in the first place.<sup>6</sup> The life of Augustine is an exposition of the method of searching for Christ since the Bishop of Hippo appropriated what he came to discover about Christ revealed in the Scriptures.<sup>7</sup> His life is an embodied Christian faith, which is tested and experienced. Augustine's spirituality is a genuine path toward Christ where one can savor God.<sup>8</sup>

From the writings of Benedict XVI, various episodes on the life of Augustine were utilized to elucidate his contention about the search for the real Christ. Benedict XVI uses an event in the life of Augustine to explain his assertions about the method of searching for Christ. Benedict XVI reconstructs Augustine's life as a basis in the search for the real Jesus. It can be a pattern in the search for the real Christ.

### **Augustine's Human Christ**

Benedict XVI tells that Augustine was not a pagan but he was greatly influenced by his mother Monica who raised him in the Christian faith. In fact, Augustine had received the salt, a sign of acceptance in the catechumenate, and was always fascinated by the figure of Jesus Christ; indeed, he said that he had always loved Jesus but had drifted further

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*of Hippo*. edited by Joseph Leinhard, SJ. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009, 144.

<sup>6</sup>Markus Bockmuehl, "Saints' Lives as Exegesis," in Adrian Pabst and Angus Paddison, eds., *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth: Christ, Scripture and the Church*, London: SCM Press, 2009, 128.

<sup>7</sup>McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2016. Kindle Edition. (Kindle Locations 3111-3114).

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, translated by Sr. Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, 352.

and further away from ecclesial faith and practice.<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI presupposes Augustine's view of Christ was yet deficient. Augustine loved Jesus and was fascinated with Him. But why would Augustine drift away from the Christ of the North African Church? As a young boy, Augustine's knowledge of Christ was immature. In his *Confessions* Augustine narrated that the sign of the cross was regularly imposed on him and that he had a passionate longing for baptism as a little boy.<sup>10</sup> In the Church, the name of Christ was signed on him and was seasoned with salt.<sup>11</sup> His mother's faith was Augustine's original path toward his search for Christ.<sup>12</sup> Augustine's mother was known for not missing a mass in her life, thus her son as a boy went to Church regularly.<sup>13</sup> At school, he pleaded for the Lord's help not to be beaten at school.<sup>14</sup> It is obvious here the young Augustine was educated in the North African Catholic tradition. In his youth, the Christian education created a deep impression on him.<sup>15</sup> However, his knowledge of Christ in his youth was that of a human being confined in a human body. The young Augustine viewed Christ as a perfect man and an authoritative ethical teacher with outstanding wisdom. He acknowledged his immature grasp of Christ and did not yet understand Him as Truth in person. Augustine, looking back to his earlier Christological understanding, confessed:

I took a different view at the time, regarding *Christ my Lord* as no more than a man, though a *man of excellent wisdom* and without peer. I was the more firmly persuaded of this because he had been born of a virgin and made plain to us by his own example that disdain for temporal goods is a condition for winning immortality; and it seemed to me that through God's solicitude for us in this respect Christ's teaching had acquired incomparable authority. But I could not even

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<sup>9</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, St., *The Confessions*. ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA, translated by Maria Boulding, OSB. New York: New York City Press, 1997, I.11.17

<sup>11</sup>*Conf.* VI.4.5; Augustine's receiving of the cross and salt was a mystagogical rite of being accepted as a catechumen. See *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study of Augustine's City of God and the sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities*. Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013, 25-31.

<sup>12</sup>*Conf.* VI.11.18.

<sup>13</sup>*Conf.* III.3.5.

<sup>14</sup>*Conf.* I.9.14.

<sup>15</sup>Johannes Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study of Augustine's City of God and the sources of His Doctrine of the Two Cities*. Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013, 30.

begin to guess what a mystery was concealed in the Word made flesh. ....In fact, however, the scriptures are trustworthy; and so I acknowledged *Christ to be a perfect man*: not a human body only, nor a body with a human soul but lacking intelligence. Yet I held that this same man was to be preferred to others not because he was Truth in person, but on account of the *outstanding excellence of his human nature and his more perfect participation in wisdom*.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that Augustine's grasp of Christ was still within the framework of Docetic Christology and in particular under the faith of Apollinarianism,<sup>17</sup> which was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 381 and affirmed by the Roman Synod under Pope Damasus in 382.<sup>18</sup> In his *Confessions* he admitted his provisional understanding of Christ as simply a human being with outstanding wisdom, a teacher with great authority, and a model ascetic.<sup>19</sup> His premature understanding of Christ was imbued with Augustine's early upbringing in the African Catholic Church. The African Church then reads the Scriptures literally and God was portrayed anthropomorphically. The Christian belief then was legalistic and orthodox.<sup>20</sup> It was obvious that Augustine's early understanding of Christ was mixed with a pagan belief of Christ having a body which is grounded in Gen 1; 26 "God created man in his likeness." It was a mandated belief that God had a huge human body extended through space (*Conf.* VI.3.4). And there is a tendency to believe in Christ as a pagan Christ or one of the Gods with a human body.<sup>21</sup> In fact Augustine's opponent *Volusianus* depicts Jesus as a magician and it is impossible for him to be in a tiny body.<sup>22</sup> His quest for the real Christ went on and was put to the test by many other images

<sup>16</sup>*Conf.* VII.19.25

<sup>17</sup>*Conf.* VII.19.25

<sup>18</sup>Brian Daley, "Christology," in *Augustine Through the Ages*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, et al. (Cambridge: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 164.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>20</sup>Johannes Van Oort, "Augustine and Hermes Trismegistus: An Inquiry into the Spirituality of Augustine's Hidden Years and his Later Assessment," [https://www.academia.edu/11989744/JECH\\_2016\\_AUGUSTINE\\_AND\\_HERMES\\_TRISMEGISTUS\\_An\\_Inquiry\\_into\\_the\\_Spirituality\\_of\\_Augustine\\_s\\_Hidden\\_Years\\_and\\_his\\_Later\\_Assessment/](https://www.academia.edu/11989744/JECH_2016_AUGUSTINE_AND_HERMES_TRISMEGISTUS_An_Inquiry_into_the_Spirituality_of_Augustine_s_Hidden_Years_and_his_Later_Assessment/) accessed February 7, 2017, 1

<sup>21</sup>Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 25.

<sup>22</sup>William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1995, 151.

of Christ<sup>23</sup> which were considered unorthodox. Augustine's fascination with Christ propelled him to go beyond the confines of the North African belief of Christ.

### Ciceronian Quest for Christ

Benedict XVI cites Augustine's conversion to philosophy which was occasioned by reading *Hortensius*. He retells in his books, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo* and *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, an event in the life of Augustine's story when he was captivated by the augur Cicero;

As a boy with a very keen intelligence, Augustine received a good education although he was not always an exemplary student. However, he learned grammar well, first in his native town and then in Madaura, and from 370, he studied rhetoric in Carthage, the capital of Roman Africa. He mastered Latin perfectly but was not quite as successful with Greek and did not learn Punic, spoken by his contemporaries. It was in Carthage itself that for the first time Augustine read the *Hortensius*, an event that can be placed at the beginning of his journey towards conversion. In fact, Cicero's text awakened within him love for wisdom, as, by then a bishop, he was to write in his Confessions: 'The book changed my feelings,' to the extent that "every vain hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardor in my heart."<sup>24</sup>

Augustine's longing for wisdom occasioned by Cicero and with the standard of the Roman philosophy moved him away from the Catholic faith. His Ciceronian standard made him judge the Bible as barbaric that could not come up to the level of the spiritual demands transmitted to

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<sup>23</sup>Augustine discerned the varied images of Jesus presented to him in his search for the real Christ namely: the Manichean Jesuses; 'Jesus, the Splendor,' 'Suffering Jesus'; and Jesus, the Son of God who only takes the appearance of a human being. The pagan Christ of the philosophers as one the *Daimones* or son of the High God, Christ the wise man and a magician; Docetistic Christ; Christ of the Apollinarians; Christ the super human creature of Arians and Eunomians; the wise but not pre-existent Photinian Christ; the Sabellian Christ who did not possess a separate existence but was simply a mode of the Father's being.

<sup>24</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 137; Conf. III.4.7; *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. Translated by Henry Taylor, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004, 86-87.

him by Roman philosophy. The Bible, due to its perceived low standard and contradictions, did not meet the criteria of his Ciceronian quest for Christ. It was somehow a culture shock for Augustine to realize that the Bible (faith) and Cicero (philosophy) are two opposite worlds.<sup>25</sup> In Benedict XVI's view, this shocking experience of Augustine led him away from the bible and inclined the young Augustine to adopt the Gnosticism which separated the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Covenant.<sup>26</sup> Augustine's quest for (Wisdom) Christ at this time was within the framework of reason breaking away from faith. Augustine could not reconcile the 'Jesus' of the Old Testament and the 'Jesus' of the New Testament.<sup>27</sup> Augustine's Christological reading was "reason seeking understanding." He tried to read the bible with the Ciceronian standard but which resulted to the profound distaste of the Bible. Augustine's desire for wisdom and expertise in Classical education led him to find more of something intellectual and unsubmitive to the authority of the Catholic faith.<sup>28</sup> No doubt Augustine found the Manichaeism, the dualist, quasi-Gnostic system, alluring and elegant.<sup>29</sup>

### **Augustine Encounters Manichean Jesuses**

Benedict XVI describes Augustine's quest for Christ with the Manichean method of reading as a deficient fusion between rational search for truth and love for Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> Augustine's search for Christ continued not in the Catholic Christianity of Africa but in a new breed of spiritual Christianity, Manichaeism. It was easy for Augustine to be a 'hearer' of the sect for the Manichees boasted that they could transport their hearers to God through reason, without imposing a belief. They

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<sup>25</sup>Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 86-87; Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 105; Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, 57.

<sup>26</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*. Translated by Graham Harrison San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986, 57.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 33.

<sup>29</sup>See, Robert Barron, *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2015, 4, Kindle Edition.

<sup>30</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 170.

constantly preached the Christ<sup>31</sup> and Mani was considered as an apostle of Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> According to Benedict XVI, Augustine saw Jesus in the religion of reason as the true teacher of wisdom, a great illuminator who enlightens and grants gnosis to humankind.<sup>33</sup> Kevin Coyle affirms the Christocentrism of Manichaeism and considers Jesus not just as one of the many saviors but as the Redeemer par excellence.<sup>34</sup>

The young Augustine seemed to find answers to his questions and joined the Manicheans even though Mani's Christ is completely at odds with Monica's Orthodox Christ. Augustine as a 'hearer' for nine years<sup>35</sup> found three Jesuses while the Christ he knew as a young boy in the African Catholic Church was identified as evil or false Christ. These images of Christ were a product of reading of the Scriptures and also the undercurrent understanding of Platonic dualism. Jesus may be central to this Religion of the Light but surprisingly according to Serge Lancel, Augustine found three Jesuses combined in the Manichaean Christology. The first was that of Jesus the Splendor, a transcendent cosmic being, the initiator of the last stage of the reconquest of Light. A second mythical image was Suffering Jesus, (*Jesus Patibilis*). He was nailed to the 'Cross of Light,' the world. He was the one diffused throughout the whole of nature. The third is the 'apparent historical Jesus,' Son of God in the appearance of man. He was the Jesus of the Gospels without earthly parentage. He came to the land of the Jews but without a real body and did not historically suffer crucifixion, unless in a mystical fashion.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Conf. III, 6.10; Conf III.6.19.

<sup>32</sup>Serge, Lancel, *St. Augustine*, trans. by Antonia Nevill, London: SCM Press, 2002., 37-38; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, a New Edition. Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 2000, 39.

<sup>33</sup>Johannes Van Oort, "Augustine and Hermes Trismegistus, 2; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Preface," in Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, Preface; Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 138.

<sup>34</sup>Kevin Coyle, "Jesus, Mani, and Augustine," in *In search of Truth: Augustine, Manichaeism and other Gnosticism: Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty*. Brill Berg, Jacob Albert van Den, et al. Eds., Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2011, 365.

<sup>35</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 170.

<sup>36</sup>Lancel, *St. Augustine*, translated by Antonia Nevill, London: SCM Press, 2002, 38; Kevin Coyle, "Mani, Manicheism," in *Augustine Through the Ages*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, et al. (Cambridge: William Eerdmans Publishing

This Manichean Christology resonates well with the Platonic dichotomy between sensible and intelligible. The sensible or corporeal is subordinate to the intelligible or incorporeal. If Christ is God, then he cannot be saturated with something material. In fact the Manicheans believed that human flesh has evil origins. Hence the ‘Christian Jesus’ for the Manicheans is false and evil in disguise. This Christian Jesus incarnated with human flesh, is the one who was truly nailed to the cross.<sup>37</sup> The real Jesus for them is spiritual. He originated from the light realm and was sent to reveal divine knowledge (gnosis) to Adam and Eve.<sup>38</sup> The real Jesus cannot be born from Mary and cannot be born at all. Manicheans also believed that the ‘Father of Jesus’ identified by Christians and Jews in the Scriptures is also evil, an evil god. Therefore, the god of the Old Testament is a false father of Jesus. Paula Fredriksen observes that Mani’s Christ was a son of a high god and could have no direct involvement in evil flesh. Christ had only seemed to have flesh but was never truly in a fleshly body. The father of this docetic Christ was not the god of the Old Testament.<sup>39</sup> This deity in the readings of the Manicheans, (e.g. Fortunatus) behaved in a badly unstable, envious, needy, and cruel fashion. The Jews’ god in the Old Testament took pleasure in the blood of both men and beasts.<sup>40</sup> The Jewish god who speaks and appears in history contains the characteristics of a lower god or *daimon* (devil).<sup>41</sup> Hence, it is impossible for this deity to be identified as the High God and Father of the real Jesus as savior and revealer of divine knowledge.

Augustine assimilated an unorthodox view of Jesus with his sojourn with the Manicheans. By this time in the life of Augustine it is possible that his understanding of Christ suffers tensions within the framework of flesh and spirit resulting from the deep impressions of his childhood experiences about the Christ confined within a body and the Manichean Christ that should be transcendent and spiritual. Augustine was puzzled in the total contradiction between the transcendent Christ and the immanent Christ.

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Co., 1999), 522.

<sup>37</sup>Coyle, “Mani, Manicheism,” 522.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*. London: Yale University Press, 2010. Kindle Edition, 111.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Fredriksen, “Augustine: On the Jesus the Jew,” *Augustinian Studies* 42/1 (2011): 7.

### Augustine at the Crossroads

According to Benedict XVI, the Manicheans facilitated Augustine's career as a teacher and Rhetor. But they failed to satisfy Augustine's inquisitive mind, doubts<sup>42</sup> plagued the mind of the Rhetorician. Benedicts XVI says, Augustine

left the Manichees and moved to Rome and then to Milan, where the imperial court resided at that time and where he obtained a prestigious post through the good offices and recommendations of the prefect of Rome, Symmacus, a pagan hostile to St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan.<sup>43</sup>

The downhearted Augustine took refuge in the Skeptics in Milan still clueless in finding the Truth.<sup>44</sup> Augustine was not satisfied anymore with the reasoning and philosophy of the Manicheans. Augustine reverted to Cicero and finally broke off his ties with the Manicheans. This is a decisive reorientation in Augustine's search for wisdom wherein he took refuge in doubts with the *Academicians* in Milan autumn of 384.<sup>45</sup> The Skeptic<sup>46</sup> stance added more tension to his search for Christ. Is true knowledge of Christ possible?<sup>47</sup> The *Academicians* held that any rational man could not gain knowledge with absolute certainty. They doubted the possibility of gaining true knowledge mediated by the sensible

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid; Lancel narrates the question raised by Nebridius to Augustine as Hearer. It was Nebridius who triggered Augustine to doubt the existence of the two opposing powers claimed by the Manichees. See, Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine*, 53-55; Augustine's fruit of his philosophical inquiry is the discovery of the contradictions between the views held by the Manicheans and those of Cicero's. See Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 46.

<sup>43</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 138; Ratzinger, *Preface*, in Pontifical Biblical Commission, Preface.

<sup>44</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 100.

<sup>45</sup>See, Lancel, *St. Augustine*, 63.

<sup>46</sup>To Augustine this form of Skepticism was known as the New Academy. Their teachings can be summarized into two theses: (1) nothing could be known for certain, and thus, (2) nothing could be assented to. All those who make claim of apprehending some truth were simply mistaken. In Toom, *Thought Clothed*, 23-24; see also Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 69-71.

<sup>47</sup>Tarmo Toom, *Thought Clothed with Sound: Augustine's Christological Hermeneutics in De Doctrina Christiana*, Washington, DC: Bell & Howell Co., 2001 21.



realm.<sup>48</sup> The sensible realm, in reference to the intelligible reality, is just secondary or inferior. Thus the knowledge or truth derived from it can be deceptive or inadequate.<sup>49</sup> For the Manicheans, knowledge or truths can be found in their books. The conformity to this truth in their books is the access to gain it.<sup>50</sup>

Augustine became skeptical with the Manicheans and with the Academicians as well. The Manichean's way to Wisdom is not the real way. Augustine believed in the existence of Wisdom but the way leading to it is ambiguous. With the burning heart of Augustine and his belief in the existence of Wisdom, he went on with his quest. The alternative route was by way of authority, that men might use some 'authority' to point the way to truth.<sup>51</sup> Augustine's *Contra Academicos*, refutes the stand of the Academicians where he points out the possibility of attainment of truth through the authority of Christ. In *Contra Academicos*, Augustine stressed that truth is revealed in Christ and the truth is accessible through the incarnated Christ.<sup>52</sup> This belief in the incarnation of the Divine Intellect as a road to the attainment of Truth or Wisdom demarcates a line between the Neo Platonic philosophers and Augustine. The philosophers had pointed out that Christ, the Divine Reason, is the goal and the Skeptics also point out to the inability of any rational human to attain such goal.

### **Eureka: the Way to Christ**

Benedict XVI says despite doubts and confusions in Augustine's mind, his restless heart moved him to listen to Ambrose's sermons in order to enrich his knowledge and rhetorical skills. Benedict XVI cites *Conf.* V. 14, 24, saying that Augustine was captivated more with the substance of Ambrose sermons.<sup>53</sup> Ambrose gave the answer to Augustine's lingering questions.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>49</sup>Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of St. Augustine*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 194.

<sup>50</sup>Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, New Edition. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, 69-70.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>52</sup>Toom, *Thought Clothed*, 34-35.

<sup>53</sup> Ambrose's Christian Neo-Platonistic sermons demonstrated to Augustine an image of God as a spiritual being and evil is not an independent entity but only originates from the human will. These teachings of Ambrose cohere to his readings of Neo-Platonism in which God was pictured as a spiritual being and evil as a non-being. See, Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 49.

The great difficulty with the Old Testament, because of its lack of rhetorical beauty and lofty philosophy, was resolved in Saint Ambrose's preaching through his typological interpretation of the Old Testament: Augustine realized that the whole of the Old Testament was a journey toward Jesus Christ. Thus, he found the key to understanding the beauty and even the philosophical depth of the Old Testament and grasped the whole unity of the mystery of Christ in history as well as the synthesis between philosophy, rationality, and faith in Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Benedict XVI points out Augustine's discovery of the unity of the two Testaments. He takes cue from Augustine's *Confession* V.14.24.<sup>55</sup> Through Ambrose Augustine learned to read anew the Old Latin Bible, the Allegorical exegesis. It is

an interpretation of the Old Testament that made transparent the relationship of Israel's Bible to Christ and thus revealed that Wisdom for which he searched. What was overcome was not only the exterior obstacle of an unsatisfactory literary form of the Old Latin Bible but, above all, the interior obstacle of a book that was no longer just a document of the religious history of a particular people, with all its strayings and mistakes. It revealed instead a Wisdom addressed to all and came from God. Through the transparency of Israel's long, slow historical journey, that reading of Israel's Bible identified Christ, the Word, the eternal Wisdom.<sup>56</sup>

Ambrose demonstrated to Augustine the use of allegorical reading of the Scriptures, which created a deep impression on the young Rhetor. Augustine remembered Ambrose asserting in his sermons the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians, 2Cor 3:6 as a hermeneutical key to the reading of the Scriptures.<sup>57</sup> It was at this time that Augustine began to learn spiritual interpretation from rhetorical structure of "letter and

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<sup>54</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 139.

<sup>55</sup>Augustine confessed: I heard some difficult passage of the Old Testament explained figuratively; such passages had been death to me because I was taking them literally. As I listened to many such scriptural texts being interpreted in a spiritual sense I confronted my own attitude, or at least that despair which had led me to believe that no resistance whatever could be offered to people who loathed and derided the law and the prophets.

<sup>56</sup> Ratzinger, *Preface*, in Pontifical Biblical Commission, Preface.

<sup>57</sup>Karlfried Froehlich, "Take up and Read: Basics of Augustine's Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 58/1 (January 2004), 6.

spirit.”<sup>58</sup> As Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* that he was “delighted to hear Ambrose often asserting in his sermons to the people, as a principle on which he must insist emphatically, “*The letter is death-dealing, but the spirit gives life.*” This he would tell them as he drew aside the veil of mystery and opened to them the spiritual meaning of passages which, taken literally, would seem to mislead.”<sup>59</sup> Ambrose reoriented Augustine to read the Bible anew from a spiritual vantage point. Michael Cameron argued that Ambrose led Augustine not to “interpret immaterial reality but to a rhetorical construction that accommodated Scripture’s written letter (*scriptum*), to the divine author’s intention, (*voluntas*).”<sup>60</sup> Augustine, as a former Ciceronian devotee and a Manichean Hearer, now saw the bible with reverence and faith especially the Old Testament that was considered as absurd by the Manicheans. Ambrose helped Augustine to overcome the contradictions in the Scriptures through figurative interpretation.<sup>61</sup> The ‘Ex-Manichean Hearer’, now began to see the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Augustine gave special attention to the harmony between the Old and New Testaments for one God wrote them.<sup>62</sup> Augustine learned that the Bible was a vast unified divine discourse that enabled him to receive the concept of immateriality.<sup>63</sup>

Benedict XVI sees that the conversion of Augustine to Christianity, through Ambrose, demonstrates the fusion of reason, faith, and love in his search for Christ.<sup>64</sup> Benedict XVI says, Augustine realized that reason couldn’t stand alone in the quest for Christ. Faith or the authority of the Church should be linked to reason.<sup>65</sup> This is how the Master Rhetorician said described learning experience:

In the Platonists I learned that ‘In the beginning was the Word’. In the Christians I learned, that ‘The Word became flesh’. And it is only thus that the Word came to me.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 36.

<sup>59</sup> *Conf.* 6.4.6.

<sup>60</sup>Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*. 36. This scripture reading from *scriptum* to *voluntas* will be a hermeneutical ground for Augustine’s theory of signs or semiotics.

<sup>61</sup>Toom, *Augustine on Scriptures*.76.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*,86.

<sup>63</sup>Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*,41.

<sup>64</sup>Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (Light of Faith) AAS 105 (2013), 555-596, 33.

<sup>65</sup>Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, xii.

<sup>66</sup>Benedict XVI, with Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own*

Augustine discovered that the Word was not a remote and transcendent idea but it is a Person and the way to God.

Augustine learned the powerful synthesis of faith and reason in the epistemic search for Christ. These are the two forces that will lead to the sound knowledge of Christ: *crede ut intelligas* (believe in order to understand) - believing paves the way to crossing the threshold of the truth - and inseparably, *intellige ut credas* (understand, the better to believe), by which the believer scrutinizes the truth to be able to find God and to believe.<sup>67</sup> Benedict XVI saw that Augustine's knowledge of Christ grew profoundly when he discovered the symbiotic relationship between reason and faith, theology and philosophy. Benedict XVI says that faith without reason ends in fideism, but reason without faith ends in nihilism.<sup>68</sup> Augustine witnessed this in the North African Church where the authority was not questioned. Faith was not scrutinized nor questioned by believers. He also experienced with the influence of philosophers that reason which searches without faith ends in going astray. These two dimensions, faith and reason, should not be separated or placed in opposition; rather, they must always go hand in hand. Benedict XVI cites *Conta Academicos* 3.20.43, wherein Augustine learned that faith and reason are the two forces that lead us to knowledge.<sup>69</sup> The harmony between faith and reason means that God is not inaccessible: he is not far from our reason and our life; he is close to every human being, close to our hearts and to our reason.<sup>70</sup>

Augustine in contrast with the Philosophers<sup>71</sup> and Skeptics, felt the closeness of God to man with extraordinary intensity. God's presence

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Words, 105.

<sup>67</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 146.

<sup>68</sup>Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 5.

<sup>69</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 146.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Augustine's immersion in Milan (384-387) with the Christian Neo-Platonists and Neo-Platonists philosophers provided him many answers to his perplexities brought about by the Manicheans. His Milanese experience created an avenue toward a spiritual liberation and strong foundations in his philosophical thinking. However, Augustine's serious appreciation of Neo-Platonism, led him to conclude that the Platonists did not portray Christ correctly. The philosophers mentioned the Logos, but did not acknowledge the Word Incarnate. See Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 50-52; Lancel, *St. Augustine*, 82-84.

in man is profound and at the same time mysterious, but he can recognize and discover it deep within himself.

Do not go outside, return to within yourself; truth dwells in the inner man; and if you find that your nature is changeable, transcend yourself. But remember, when you transcend yourself, you are transcending a soul that reasons. Reach, therefore, to where the light of reason is lit.<sup>72</sup>

Benedict XVI adds more citations of Augustine's inner journey, which made him realize what is remote but mysterious as well. In *Confessions* III.6.11, Augustine confessed to God,

you were more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me, *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*. In another passage remembering the period before his conversion, you were there before me, but I had departed from myself. I could not even find myself, much less you.<sup>73</sup>

The harmony of faith and reason opens the access to God's Mystery and also to man's authentic identity. The quest of reason alone (philosophy) presupposes a distant God which equally indicates that man is alienated from himself. Thus, the symbiotic relationship of faith and reason in Augustine's experience are two forces of understanding which lead to the knowledge of God and self. The separation of the two is damaging to the Church and to oneself as well. As Augustine confessed; "Let me know you, O you who know me; then shall I know even as I am known."<sup>74</sup>

Augustine's conversion experience in Milanese church exhibits the movement of his soul from material to spiritual, which he learned from Ambrose. Benedict XVI adds the influence of the liturgy of the Church in captivating Augustine's heart to ascend to God. Augustine confessed: "How I wept to hear your hymns and songs, deeply moved by

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<sup>72</sup>*Da Ver. Rel.* 39,72.

<sup>73</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 146-148; Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*. Translated by Adrian Walker New York: Doubleday Religious Publishing Group, 2011, 24.

<sup>74</sup>*Conf.* X.1.1; see Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*. Translated by Martha M. Matesich, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996. 30, 35; see Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*. Michigan: Brazos Press, 2009, 70.

the voices of Your sweetly singing Church! Their voices penetrated my ears, and with them truth found its way into my heart; my frozen feeling for God began to thaw, tears flowed and I experienced joy and relief.”<sup>75</sup> Here Benedicts XVI comments:

Augustine, the academic man who had come to appreciate Christianity as a philosophy but was uneasy about the Church herself, which seemed to have a lot of vulgarity about her, it was the singing Church which gave him a shattering experience, penetrating the whole man, and which led him forward on the way to the Church.<sup>76</sup>

Augustine’s sensitivity to music overwhelmed him and made him ascend to the reality to which the singing refers. His music experience, the tangible, led him to the source of the beautiful harmonious melody, the spiritual.<sup>77</sup>

In the experience of Augustine’s participation in the worship of the Church made him realize that the quest for Christ can be in its best if done in the community of believers. It is true that Augustine was moved by the story of St. Anthony of Egypt; however he did not follow the way of the hermit in following Christ. He was not an individual searcher but chose to live in community. He was aware of the weakness of reason and the need for faith. Thus he chose the path of faith seeking understanding in the community of believers. Benedict XVI asserts that Augustine prefers the Church as a way of faith rather than individual search of the truth. Augustine came to deeper understanding of the Christian faith through the influence of his parents in particular St. Monica.<sup>78</sup> Benedict adds, for Augustine, the Church is the locus to attain *cor pura*. It is the ecclesial faith, which feeds him to grow in matters of the spirit. The faith of the Church was his pre-understanding in growing knowledge about Christ.<sup>79</sup>

Augustine’s interpretation of the Scripture is never an intellectual process but rather a lived one, demanding full engagement in the life

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<sup>75</sup>Conf. IX, 6,14.

<sup>76</sup>Ratzinger, *The Feast Of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. Graham Harrison, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986, 116-117.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 110-111.

<sup>78</sup>Aidan Nichols, OP, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger, new edition*, London: Burns and Oates, 2007, 20; Benedict XVI. *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 137.

<sup>79</sup>Sec, Conf. XIII.34.49.

of the Church, which is life according to the Spirit. It is Christ the Lord who guided Augustine to transcend the literal sense of the letter and enabled him to find at last the answer to his deep inner restlessness and his thirst for truth.<sup>80</sup> Augustine was convinced that Mother Church was a necessary condition in the search for Christ. The Church is the place where God gives us the Invisible to feed upon in visible form, thus leading us evermore towards the Invisible until we become adults in his presence. The Church now becomes a necessary stage in the ascent of the soul to Wisdom. All must pass through the triad of *credere, auctoritas, humilitas*, ‘have faith, accept authority, practice humility’, if they are to see lady Wisdom in its beauty.<sup>81</sup>

The intense quest of Augustine for Christ, beginning from *Hortentius* up to his last breath, is a model of the method of seeking the face of the Lord. According to Benedict XVI Augustine was a passionate seeker of truth: he was from the beginning and throughout his life.<sup>82</sup> It is an expression of those described by Benedict XVI in the Beatitudes “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*” (Mt 5:6).

Augustine perfectly fits as a *vir desideriorum*, as a man of longings. He is a man on the lookout, who is in search of something great, of true justice, of the true good. He cannot be contented with things as they are and refuse to stifle the restlessness of heart that points man toward something greater and so sets him on the inward journey to reach it—rather like the wise men from the East seeking Jesus, the star that shows the way to truth, to love, to God. Augustine’s interior sensitivity enabled him to see and hear the subtle signs that God sends into the world.<sup>83</sup>

Augustine converted to Christ who is Truth and Love, followed him throughout his life, and became a model for every human being, for all of us in search of God. Among all the paths in history, Augustine’s pattern in seeking God is the path that Christians must find. It is a path to God. His quest for the real Christ means the appropriation of Truth and Love in his life and sharing the fruits of his love with the community

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<sup>80</sup>VD, 38.

<sup>81</sup>Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 21.

<sup>82</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 155.

<sup>83</sup>Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 91, 95.

of believers.<sup>84</sup> His life became a manuscript<sup>85</sup> a lasting expression of the way leading to Truth and Love.

Benedict XVI finds Augustine still alive today in his writings. He believes that Augustine still is an icon of seeker of Truth. The ancient Augustine still is a man of today. He is a man whose faith never gets old. He talks to everyone through his writings. Augustine encourages us to entrust ourselves to this ever-living Christ and in this way find the path of life.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Crede ut Intelligas: Augustine's Christological Hermeneutic of Faith*** **Faith's Quest Doubted**

Modern search for Christ affirms the possibility of creating a portrait of Jesus without faith. One needs to sift the faith of evangelists in order to reconstruct a real historical Jesus that is quite distinct from the Christ of Faith. The way of faith, in the modern scholarship, is apparently considered a hindrance or not scientific in the quest for the historical Jesus. Reason's authority gains the upper hand in the search for the Jesus of History. There is the attack on faith accused as old and obsolete. Faith, according to Harnack, is the cause of religious division. The scholarly search for Christ apparently disqualifies the simple believers. The historical Jesus was 'prisoned' within the confines of modern research.<sup>87</sup>

This modern Christological issue resonates in Augustine's quest for Christ. If one wishes to ascend to God, the philosophical discourse is the reasonable way to possible knowledge of the Divine. According to Basil Studer, the ancients regarded faith as inferior in comparison with *episteme* (scientific knowledge) or *gnosis* (higher knowledge). *Fides* (faith) only renders indirect knowledge of things unseen while the *gnosis*

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<sup>84</sup>See, Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 156.

<sup>85</sup>Serm. 227; Daniel Sheerin, "Eucharistic Liturgy," in *The Oxford Handbook to Early Christian Studies*, eds Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David Hunter, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, 715.

<sup>86</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 144.

<sup>87</sup>See, Roland Dienes, "Can the 'Real' Jesus be Identified with the Historical Jesus?", in *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth*, edited by Adrian Pabst and Angus Paddison, London: SCM, 2009, 203.



gives insight to the present things.<sup>88</sup> The way of reason is the path to the pursuit of wisdom. Augustine himself once was convinced of using reason alone to know God. This was due to the influence of the radical group that was extremely rationalist in their approach to God.<sup>89</sup> Such groups of men considered themselves belonging to the religion of reason and followers of Mani. They abhorred the demand of African Church to accept, without asking questions, the authority of the Scriptures.<sup>90</sup> Instead, Manicheans attacked the authority of the Scriptures and questioned the many inconsistencies of the Christian Bible, particularly the lack of harmony between the Old and New Testaments. Their attack on the authority of the Scriptures meant that faith in the Christian Bible without questioning can not provide a vision of God. Faith or authority was a hindrance to the quest for God. The vision of God should be based on reason and not on faith. Augustine tells us that the Manicheans relied on reason alone, free from any external authority, rejecting the Old Testament and amending the New.<sup>91</sup> John Peter Kenny says, that Augustine was convinced that empirical reason alone was inadequate to address issues of theology. The religion of reason had failed to render an adequate account of its religious materialism, one that could refute alternative theories. But, more importantly, its apparent intellectualism had appealed to his vanity. It flattered his self-regard as a member of an ontological elite who alone contained within themselves the sparks of divine light, goodness, and reason.<sup>92</sup> It was as if it developed a pride in him, believing that only the intellectual elite have an access to the divine while those uneducated do not have the privilege to ascend to the heights of contemplating Wisdom.

### *Crede ut Intelligas; Intelligere ut Credas*

Augustine's starting point in expounding the Christian faith is his own *credo* that is identified with the Catholic faith. In *De Trinitate* I.7., Augustine begins with the faith in the Trinity as a pre-understanding

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<sup>88</sup>Basil Studer, *A Rational Knowledge of the Bible*, in *The History of Theology: The Patristic Period vol I*, eds Angelo Di Berardino and Basil Studer, trans by Matthew O'Connell, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997, 378.

<sup>89</sup>Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 37.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>91</sup>John Peter Kenny, "Faith and Reason," in David Merconi and Eleonor Stump, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, Kindle Edition, 277.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 278.

in his theological inquiry. He proposed to find biblical foundations to prove the unity and equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. According to Benedict XVI, Augustine's inquiry of the ecclesial faith is an investigation of something reasonable. The ecclesial faith is reasoned, established and enduring. Such faith is the door to understanding since it is coming from Reason. The very act of faith comes from Reason. The submission to the belief of the Church means opening the door to the knowledge of God.<sup>93</sup> Yet the understanding of Christ stimulates the believers to quest for more knowledge at the same time enriching one's faith in Christ. The understanding leads the believers to anchor deeply into the ecclesial faith and continue the search for the face of Christ. The understanding ignites the enthusiasm of the *eros* to seek the face of the Beloved. The combination of the two forces, *Crede ut Intelligas; Intellege ut Credas*, makes a spiral movement leading to the Truth.<sup>94</sup>

Augustine executed his Christological method in his book, *De Doctrina Christiana*. Book I begins with the summary of the Christian faith. The first section (1.5.5–19.21) is creedal in its ordering of topics, beginning with God and moving through incarnation to the resurrection of the dead. Augustine's Christological credo serves as a beginning and a normative horizon in his search for an authentic knowledge of the Christ. His credo includes the historical Jesus, who was born of the Virgin Mary; who suffered under Pontius Pilate; who was crucified, died and was buried; who descended into Hell; and who on the third day rose again from the dead and ascended into Heaven.<sup>95</sup> The Book I covers God's salvific activity in the incarnated Christ.

The submission to faith does not require any intellectual giant with compelling ideas. It is a quest grounded firmly in the faith in Christ who is the source, method and criterion for understanding. It is the faith of the Church in Christ. Therefore, the ecclesial faith guarantees firmness and stability. The Church is not a factory of reconstructed theories about Jesus Christ. The ecclesial faith in Christ is a faith that has endured for centuries. Hence, Benedict XVI suggests that it is reasonable to trust

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<sup>93</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium*, An Interview with Peter Seewald. Translated by Adrian Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997, 33; Ayres, "Augustine on the Rule of Faith", 37.

<sup>94</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 146.

<sup>95</sup>See, *De Trin.* 1.7, 8. The Son is coequal to the Father and born in the flesh, suffered, rose and ascended.

the faith of the Church in Christ that is not a theory but a living reality. The Church faith has only one aim which is, the understanding of who and what this Jesus really was.<sup>96</sup> The faith of the Manicheans, Donatists, Arians, and reconstructed portraits of the historical Jesus did not endure. The Christ of the orthodox faith is still standing firm, transcending the times, which is a proof of its veracity.

The search for Christ should be well grounded in the enduring faith before it explores new meanings. Benedict XVI explains the other meaning of Is 7:9 LXX.

If you do not believe [if you do not hold firm to Yahweh], then you will have no foothold. (Is 7:9).... It includes the meanings [of] truth, firmness, firm ground, and furthermore the meanings [of] loyalty, to trust, entrust oneself, take one's stand on something, believe in something; thus faith in God appears as a holding on to God through which man gains a firm foothold for his life. Faith is thereby defined as taking up a position, as taking a stand trustfully on the ground of the word of God.<sup>97</sup>

Benedict XVI suggests that Augustine's Christological inquiry is to trust and take the position of the Church in the search for Christ. Christ-questers need pre-understanding before setting on the course of the quest for Christ. In *Lumen Fidei*, Benedict XVI says, that without knowledge, the seeker cannot move forward. He builds on Augustine's synthesis of the ideas of "understanding" and "being established" in the *Confessions* about entrusting oneself to the firm foundation of truth.<sup>98</sup> Augustine confessed: "I will stand still, then, and find firm footing in you, in your Truth."<sup>99</sup> Those who rely on their own reason or stand on their own will not succeed in their quest for Christ.<sup>100</sup> The success of the quest for the real Jesus will depend on the sense of belongingness to the Church, the Body of Christ. One must remain in the body in order to listen to the Head speaking. The theories or modern reconstructions about Jesus, made individually, will just fade away. It is advisable then to hold fast to faith of the Church as starting in the Christological

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<sup>96</sup>Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, Translated by J.R. Foster, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004, 201.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 69; See also, *LF*, 24.

<sup>98</sup>*LF*, 24.

<sup>99</sup>*Conf.* XI, 30,40; *LF*, 24.

<sup>100</sup>See, *Conf.* VIII.27.

hermeneutics in order to survive the quest for Christ. Faith, as standing firm and understanding, means to entrust oneself to Jesus who is divine and a living reality and not a mere theological reconstruction.

Augustine is aware of the dual meaning of Isaiah 7:9. Both meanings are important factors in the Christological search. According to Augustine Is. 7:9 can be translated as: *nisi credideritis non intellegitis* (if you do not believe, you will not understand) and *nisi credideritis non permanebitis* (if you do not believe, you will not stand fast). Holding fast to the faith in the search for Christ is essential in the way to the eternal vision of God.<sup>101</sup> The method of searching for Christ makes sense only if the exegete will accept the articles of faith as pre-understanding. The growing knowledge of Christ is not a blind leap of trust to a body of doctrines. It entails the personal acceptance of Jesus in his teachings. Holding fast to faith means personalization of faith in Jesus as the Christ. Benedict XVI explains that there is no separation between the person and teachings of Jesus. Jesus identified himself with His word. Hence, the quest for Jesus in the *regula fidei* would mean knowing the person of Christ. The historical Jesus portrayed in the creeds is indistinguishable to the person of Christ.<sup>102</sup> The Christological inquiry should therefore lead to the reception of the faith in Christ or the assimilation of the person of Jesus. Belief in the Christian faith means understanding the Person of Jesus. Understanding the Christian faith should lead to personal and deeper faith in Christ. Augustine's *crede ut intelligas; intellige ut credas* bridges the gap between the academic exercise and faith. The perception of a reasonable faith should lead the believer to a stand on firm faith in Christ. It is a solution to the crisis of faith in Christ that shields the quester to fall into fundamentalism and nihilism.<sup>103</sup>

### The Forces to Christological Wisdom

Benedict XVI's repetition of the Augustinian synthesis of faith and reason which are forces that will lead to knowledge of Christ is a constant theme in his writings.<sup>104</sup> The fusion of faith and reason can be found in *Lumen Fidei*,<sup>105</sup> *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of*

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<sup>101</sup>See, *Doc. Chr.* II. 39-40; *De Trin.* VIII.3.8; XV.Prologue.2

<sup>102</sup>Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 202-205.

<sup>103</sup>Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 5.

<sup>104</sup>See, Chapter IV.A.5

<sup>105</sup>*LF*, Chapter 2.

*Rome to Augustine of Hippo*,<sup>106</sup> *Introduction to Christianity*,<sup>107</sup> *Principles of Catholic Theology*, and so on. Benedict XVI asserts the experience of Augustine regarding the need to fuse faith and reason in the search for Christ. Augustine realized that reason could not stand alone in the quest for Christ.<sup>108</sup>

Augustine's hermeneutic of faith, for Benedict XVI, is a continuous seeking of the face of Christ. There is a sense of spiral movement in the search for Christ. When the believer starts the quest from faith and then the new discovery will be like a stimulus to thirst for more fresh understanding. There is a certain restlessness and longing in the quest for Christ. The *crede ut intelligas, intellige ut credas* is a reasonable way to find a better portrait of Christ. The Augustinian maxim is not a mere academic exercise but a method of nourishing faith in Christ.

Benedict XVI believes with Augustine that the harmony between faith and reason means that God is not inaccessible: he is not far from our reason and our life; he is close to every human being, close to our hearts and to our reason.<sup>109</sup> Augustine in contrast with the Philosophers and Skeptics, felt the closeness of God to man with extraordinary intensity. Benedict XVI usually quotes Augustine's *Confessions* III.6.11: *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*.<sup>110</sup> He explains that it is only possible to know God because he has shown himself. Benedict XVI expounds the transcendence and immanence of God taking cues from the Bishop of Hippo. God enters history but the otherness of God remains that is why there will always be new discoveries and fresh understanding about God.

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<sup>106</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 179-183.

<sup>107</sup>Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*,

<sup>108</sup>Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, xii; see, Chapter IV.A.5

<sup>109</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 146.

<sup>110</sup>Ratzinger, *Introduction To Christianity*, 245; Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 146-148; Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 24; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*. Translated by Adrian Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995, 85; Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger, 197, 75.

God's presence in man is profound and at the same time mysterious, but he can recognize and discover it deep within himself.<sup>111</sup>

Benedict XVI's Christological hermeneutic can be considered as a unifying principle, which links the reconciliation of faith and reason, history and faith, exegesis and theology, philosophy and theology, bible and Church, among others<sup>112</sup>. The principle of reconciliation in Christology is perfectly grounded in Augustine's conception of Christ as a unifying principle. As Fitzgerald asserts, Augustine, from the time of his conversion, had, in the person of Christ, a principle of coherence which provided the fundamental unity of his thought. Augustine had found that unity in the words of Paul who proclaimed Jesus Christ as the one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Col 2: 3).<sup>113</sup> Benedict XVI follows Augustine in his ability to reconcile disparate concepts or disciplines where Jesus Christ is the key to the unity of the different contradictions.<sup>114</sup>

Augustine came to think that the Scriptures has a single divine face that replicates the body of Christ.<sup>115</sup> He rejected the Manichean belief of the Scriptures as a book filled with contradictions and inconsistencies. The way to search for Christ in the Scriptures is first believed in the unity of the Old and New Testaments having a single face of Christ.<sup>116</sup> Otherwise, it means to deface Christ. Like Benedict XVI, Augustine sought the face of the Lord<sup>117</sup> and wanted to foster a loving relationship

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<sup>111</sup> See, Chapter IV.A.5

<sup>112</sup> See McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*. McGregor identifies Benedict XVI as a Doctor of Reconciliation. He enumerates a number of syntheses accomplished by Benedict XVI in his theology.

<sup>113</sup> Allan Fitzgerald, OSA. "Jesus Christ: The Knowledge and Wisdom of God," in David Merconi and Eleonor Stump, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, Kindle Edition, 113.

<sup>114</sup> Cavadini, "Introduction," Kindle Location 116-118; see, McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Kindle Location 802-803.

<sup>115</sup> *Conf.* VII. 21.27.

<sup>116</sup> Toom, *Augustine on Scriptures*, 86.

<sup>117</sup> Benedict XVI, with Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, 11-12; McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger* (Kindle Locations 3722-3727); Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 27. Ratzinger believes that a pure heart is one which inquires after

of the community of believers with Jesus. The quest for the single face of Christ is a form of hermeneutical key through which Augustine found a way to Christ by learning to reconcile faith (theology) and reason (philosophy). Augustine's unifying skill in exegesis and theology,<sup>118</sup> in contrast to the *Paideia* of the Greeks and 'carnal' interpretations of the heretics, led him to grow in his knowledge of Christ. Augustine's hermeneutic of faith combines *Regula Fidei* and reason in his quest for the real Jesus. Such interpretation made Augustine affirm the humanity and divinity of Christ. The two forces of knowledge allowed the bishop of Hippo to see the Face of Love unveiled in revelation.<sup>119</sup> In the life of Augustine a process of integration of faith and reason led the bishop to fresh understanding of Christ. His Ciceronian thirst for truth was met by the gospel message.<sup>120</sup> It was not easy for him to achieve the synthesis between the Greek philosophy and the biblical faith. Augustine saw the figure of Jesus as the key to achieving the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Covenant. Jesus, who experiences anguish and anger, joy, hope and despair, is in the Old Testament tradition of God; in Him who is the incarnate *Logos*, the anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament are radicalized and attain their ultimate depth of meaning.<sup>121</sup> The Eternal Word enters history becoming word of God; hence, the word of God is sign points to the reality of the Word of God, in the figure of the Christ. The words of Scriptures reveal the Word sensibly in the world and act like another Incarnation of Christ, though in a limited sense.<sup>122</sup> In such revelation of the Word, one encounters the living *Logos*. This should be the goal of scriptural interpretation, the encounter of the face of Christ who reveals Himself through the Scriptures.

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God, which seeks his face (see, Ps 24:6).

<sup>118</sup>Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 44-45; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 41.

<sup>119</sup>See, Casarella, "Searching The Face of the Lord in Ratzinger's Jesus of Nazareth", in Adrian Pabst and Angus Paddison, eds., *The Pope and Jesus of Nazareth: Christ, Scripture and the Church*, London: SCM Press, 2009, 84.

<sup>120</sup>LF, 33.

<sup>121</sup>Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 57; Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 48; Harrison, *Christian Truth*, 32.

<sup>122</sup>Jared Straudt, "Reality and Sign: Thomas Aquinas and the Christological Exegesis of Pope Benedict XVI." *Nova et Vetera* 12/1 (2014), 337.

### Purified Heart

Augustine learned the existence of Logos or creative reason, who seems to be distant and unreachable for the philosophers. The philosophers could not point to him the Christ; the name of Christ was missing. Their approach to the search of wisdom was through the philosophical exercises in order to arrive at wisdom. But Augustine could not grasp the potential of the mind without the help of faith. The mind, due to sin, is weak and blinded by sins. Pure reason as the organ of seeing God does not exist for Augustine. Benedict XVI describes purified heart as the organ of seeing God. He further commends Augustine for his recognition that the ‘necessary purification of sight takes place through faith (Acts 15: 9) and through love, at all events not as a result of reflection alone and not at all by man’s own power.’<sup>123</sup> In the vision at Ostia, Augustine admitted that his mind was weak (not yet purified) and was not yet capable of prolonged vision of God.<sup>124</sup> Because of such weakness some means of help beyond the self must be sought. He snatched up the Bible again — and understood it anew. Since he could not bear the divine ‘food’ in its pure form, the divine Word mingled itself with flesh so that man might be able to enjoy it. In the Church, the divine humility has provided a medicine by its own example for the sickness from which none is immune.<sup>125</sup> Since reason is limited by its ‘infirmity,’ it cannot ascend alone leading to the way of Truth. Benedict XVI is convinced that it was the faith of the Catholic Church that led Augustine to see the Truth revealed to him. It was the ecclesial faith by reading the Epistle of Paul to the Romans 13, which helped Augustine find the way to Christ, the Truth in Person. Augustine, in one of the most famous passages of the *Confessions*, recounted that, in the torment of his reflections, withdrawing to a garden, he suddenly heard a child’s voice chanting a rhyme never heard before: *tolle, lege, tolle, lege*, pick up and read, pick up and read.<sup>126</sup> From that time onwards, he realized the God of Israel spoke to him personally - God who is able to speak to us, to come down to dwell in our midst and to accompany our journey through history, making himself known in the time of hearing and response.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 3-4;

<sup>124</sup>*Conf.* VII.10.16.

<sup>125</sup>Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 21.

<sup>126</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 155.

<sup>127</sup>*LF*, 33.



The purification of the Augustinian heart is a continuous seeking of Christ. Benedict XVI builds on Augustine's interpretation of Psalm 105.4's 'seek his face always' as a kind of never ending quest for Christ's countenance.<sup>128</sup> God is so great that we never finish our searching. He is always new. With God there is perpetual, unending encounter, with new discoveries and new joy.<sup>129</sup> Faith is the pilgrimage of thought on the way to Christ. The starting point of the quest is the visible incarnate Christ, the face of love.<sup>130</sup> The purification of the heart is fueled by new understanding and knowledge about Christ which in turn make faith in Christ stronger and richer.

### **Bible and Communal Interpretation**

Since Augustine affirmed the face of God who is love, then this God must communicate. He believed in a speaking God. God communicates to humans and enters history. Thus, Augustine asserted the Divine Speech in human words, which is Scriptures. He said, "When you read the Bible, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak to God."<sup>131</sup> It is Christ who speaks to the reader and the people of God. It is a Word in human words addressed to human beings. Augustine's assertion in hermeneutics of faith opposes the modern biblical interpretation or the hermeneutic of suspicion that treats the Bible as historiography and literary history.<sup>132</sup> Some Biblical scholars in modern exegesis are skeptic as regards the divine element of the Scriptures reducing it to just a human product.<sup>133</sup> Hence, Jesus, in such a hermeneutical framework, is regarded as a mere human being. The Resurrection of Jesus will just be interpreted as the resuscitation of Jesus. The historicity of the divine element is obviously removed in this interpretation. The faith of the witnesses of the Risen Lord is missing. Augustine believes in a God who speaks in the Bible. The texts or words are not just historical but they point beyond

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<sup>128</sup>See, *De Trin.* XVI. 2.2; *Serm.* 43.9

<sup>129</sup>Benedict XVI, with Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, 11-12.

<sup>130</sup>See, Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, Translated by Henry Taylor, edited by Stephan Otto and Vinzenz Pfnür, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005, 24-25; see Edmund Hill, "Unless You Believe, You Shall Not Understand: Augustine's Perception of Faith," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), 52-53.

<sup>131</sup>*VD*, 86; *En. Ps.* 85,7.

<sup>132</sup>Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 43.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*

themselves. The Scriptures speak about Christ; as divine and human and as the whole Christ.<sup>134</sup> Augustine comments in Ps. 37.6, where Christ spoke; of Himself, as the representative of human beings, and both together as the Head of the Church.<sup>135</sup> Hermeneutics of faith in this framework is prayerful listening to the living voice of Christ who, in His gracious love, speaks to man in the human words of the biblical texts.<sup>136</sup> It is a listening<sup>137</sup> to Christ when he speaks as Head, Body, and whole Christ. Augustine's reverent listening was assisted, utilizing language, literature, history, philosophy, logic, liberal arts, natural science, rhetoric and dialectic and other disciplines which helped him discern the voice of Christ.<sup>138</sup>

In the mind of Benedict XVI, if Augustine were alive, he will oppose the separation of the Scriptures from its natural habitat, the Church. It is very possible that Augustine would oppose that the scientific study of the biblical text be done by isolating the text from its natural environment, the Church.<sup>139</sup> This is the reason why Augustine said, I would not believe the gospel if the authority of the Catholic Church had not led me to do so.<sup>140</sup> The criterion for listening to the *viva vox* is not one's personal understanding of the Scriptures but within the

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<sup>134</sup>Serm. 341.

<sup>135</sup>Tarmo Toom, "Augustine's Case for the Multiplicity of Meanings," [https://www.academia.edu/4987940/Augustines\\_Case\\_for\\_the\\_Multiplicity\\_of\\_Meanings](https://www.academia.edu/4987940/Augustines_Case_for_the_Multiplicity_of_Meanings)/accessed February 9, 2018, 15.

<sup>136</sup>Hahn. *Covenant and Communion*, 45.

<sup>137</sup>Benedict XVI defines the word listen. It is to know and to acknowledge another and to allow him to step into the realm of one's own "I." It is readiness to assimilate his word, and therein his being, into one's own reality as well as to assimilate oneself to him in corresponding fashion. Thus, after the act of listening, I am another man, my own being is enriched and deepened because it is united with the being of the other and, through it, with the being of the world. In Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 33.

<sup>138</sup>See, Lewis Ayres, "Christology as a Contemplative Practice," in Peter Martens, ed., *In the Shadow of the Incarnation: Essays on Jesus Christ in the Early Church in Honor of Brian Daley, SJ*, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 195; see, Hahn. *Covenant and Communion*, 45; Hubertus Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans by Siegfried Schatzmann, Massachusetts: Hedrikson Publishers, 2007, 414.

<sup>139</sup>Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, 50-51; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 31; McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Kindle Locations 3121-3127.

<sup>140</sup>Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti, V. 6; Verbum Domini, 29.

life and faith of the Church, the *Regula Fidei*.<sup>141</sup> The Word of God must be heard and interpreted in the faith of the Church. As Augustine says, “the letter would kill, even that of the Gospel, were there not the inward grace healing of faith.”<sup>142</sup> The faith of the Church opens the door to the understanding of the Word of God, which, in turn, paves the way to the personal assimilation of the word. Augustine’s faith hermeneutic cautions individual interpreters to read the Scriptures without the guidance of the communal interpretation or the Church. Hence, the Bishop of Hippo certainly opposes the individual interpreters who presume to discern the message of the Scriptures without taking account of the ecclesial faith and the guidance of the interpretative community.<sup>143</sup> Exegetes should attune themselves to the ‘*vox ecclesiae*’ or to the Magisterium.

The Augustinian Christ is the Logos addressed to the community of believers (Body of Christ). The Church, in the particular Christ as priest, gives voice to the Word. The members of the body of Christ, and in particular, the priest, receive the Word (Christ) and give voice to the preaching or proclamation of the Word of God.<sup>144</sup> The proclamation of the Word in the Church resulted in the shaping of the identity of the followers of Christ. The people of God then become a *viva vox* (living voice) of the Word of God.<sup>145</sup> The process of hearing the voice of the Word of God in the Church starting from creation, to the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, to the incarnation, passion and resurrection in the New Testament, and the preaching, teaching and sacraments of the Church into the present, gives vitality to the *viva vox*.<sup>146</sup>

One expression of the *viva vox* is the *Regula Fidei* or sound narratives of faith or creedal statements. They are ruminated narratives of faith handed down to the people of God recounting the history of God’s actions dwelling on more exciting episodes and more colorful characters so that they might be considered and admired, retain the

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<sup>141</sup>VD, 29; Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 414.

<sup>142</sup>VD, 29.

<sup>143</sup>See, Curtis Freeman, *Figure and History: A Contemporary Reassessment of Augustine’s Hermeneutic*, in J. T. Lienhard, S.J., E. C. Muller & R.J. Teske, S.J., *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum* (Collectanea Augustiniana 2), New York: P. Lang, 1993, 326; Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 46.

<sup>144</sup>Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, 164.

<sup>145</sup>Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 50.

<sup>146</sup>See, Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*, Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 2013, 102; see, Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 50.

attention of the hearer, and thereby be inscribed upon their mind and taken to heart- in other words, believed and acted upon. *Regula Fidei*, then, takes the form of articulated narratives of faith utilized for Christian understanding, prepared by culture and re-received and re-interpreted in every generation.<sup>147</sup> These narratives of faith were articulations of theological reflections within the key framework of the Rule of faith designed for communicating the common faith of the Church. The *Regula Fidei*, as part of the *viva vox*, is a hermeneutical tool to discern the sound ‘voice’ among the many ‘voices’ in the life of the Church. Thus, *Regula Fidei* is a hermeneutical control or filter that sifts away the erratic interpretations in the life of the Church. It is also a pedagogical instrument to enrich the faith of the people of God and shape their lives patterned after the humble Son of God.

### **Liturgical Hermeneutic: Prayer Seeking Understanding**

Hahn cites Benedict’s essential feature of the hermeneutics of faith as a kind of “dialogue in faith with the God who speaks to us from the living experience of his people, the Church.”<sup>148</sup> Hermeneutics of Faith is a relation or dialogue with God. Man is created for God. He cannot seek God without divine initiative. Faith can only seek to understand when there is an experience of being touched by the Logos.<sup>149</sup> For Augustine, according to Benedict XVI,

when the heart (center of man) comes into contact with the God’s Logos, this inmost point of his existence is being touched. Man does not merely feel, he knows from within himself: That is it; that is HE, that is what I was waiting for. It is a kind of recognition. For we have been created in relation to God, in relation to the Logos, and our heart remains restless until it has found God. The heart, therefore, lights the way for the understanding and draws it with it into assent.<sup>150</sup>

Hermeneutics of faith boils down to the need for prayer and silence in listening to the word of God. It is basically prayer as reverent listening to the Word of God in the Scriptures, listening to the voice of Christ the Head. Augustine said;

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<sup>147</sup>Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*, 104.

<sup>148</sup> Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 46.

<sup>149</sup>Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*,

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

what the voice pronounces should linger on in the heart. There is a reciprocal relationship between how we pray and what we believe. So, we must allow ourselves to be shaped by our prayers, by the Church's 'voice' in the liturgy, which rings with Christ's own voice.<sup>151</sup>

Prayer within the liturgical assembly is a form of dialogue or a way of life. True listening to the *viva vox* or the Word of God transforms one's life into the image of Christ himself. Prayer is possible since God has spoken through his Word. Prayer is the response to the God who communicates and gives himself in love.<sup>152</sup> In the prayer and worship of the Church, which is the prayer of Christ, we experience the ultimate intimacy of the dialogic character of revelation. Praying actualizes and deepens our communion of being with God.<sup>153</sup> Augustine presupposes the need for a word/s of the Word of God in the dialogue of faith. The word of God, which was spoken and lingers in the heart is a food which must be ruminated and should resonate within the heart. The ruminated word serves as guide, nourishment and sustenance for life.<sup>154</sup> The process of rumination of the word of God is the growing process of God's domination in the life of man. Such a description denotes the experience of Augustine's mystical experience of the presence of God within himself. He felt that God is within him and yet God absorbs Augustine in Him.<sup>155</sup> Augustine adds, "*Verbo crescente, verba deficiunt*"<sup>156</sup> "when the word of God increases, the words of men fail." Here we find Jesus as a model of prayer and silence. He often withdraws to deserted places away from the crowds in order to pray in silence and to live His filial relationship with God. Silence can carve out an inner space in our very depths to enable God to dwell there, so that His word will remain within us and love for Him can take root in our minds and hearts and inspire our life.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Benedict XVI, *Questions and Answers*, Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Inc., 2008, 84.

<sup>152</sup>See, Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*, 119.

<sup>153</sup>Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 144-145.

<sup>154</sup>Ratzinger, *Prayer*, Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Inc., 2008, iBooks Edition.

<sup>155</sup>Ratzinger, *Holy Men and Women of the Middle Ages and Beyond: General Audiences 13 January 2010 – 26 January 2011*, trans. by L'Osservatore Romano, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012, 187.

<sup>156</sup>*Serm.* 228.5; 120.2;

<sup>157</sup>Ratzinger, *The School of Prayer*, Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Inc., 2008, iBooks Edition.

Thus the process of relearning prayer in silence opens a wider disposition to assimilate the word of God and opens the door to understanding the mysteries of the Word made flesh. It is obvious that in order to listen to the *viva vox* or the whole Christ speaking, prayerful silence is a necessary condition. For Augustine, according to Benedict XVI, was convinced that “only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence.”<sup>158</sup> Benedict XVI comments on this prayerful disposition of Mary before conceiving the Son of God in her flesh. The Bishop of Hippo said, “she received Jesus in her heart before she became his Mother according to the flesh. Mary’s soul was the place from which God was able to enter our humanity.”<sup>159</sup> “She bears the living Word. Mary was already the Mother of God spiritually before she became his Mother physically.”<sup>160</sup> Prayer and silence open the doors to the spiritual birth of the Word in one’s heart. Prayer and silence pave the way for the Word of God to take shape in one’s life.

Benedict XVI expounds Augustine’s view on the necessity of the birth of Christology on the relationship of Christ and his priests. The priest who listens to Christ and prepares the homily must have an attitude of silence and listening to the Word of God. Benedict XVI develops Augustine’s thought on the role of the priest in the reception of the word of God. Augustine stresses the role of priests as servants of the Word who must proclaim Christ to the people of God. Like John the Baptist, every priest must be minister of the Word and voices for the Word. His mission is dependent on the Logos Himself. Presbyters must open their hearts to the Word, receive and assimilate the Word and become voices for the Word.<sup>161</sup> The servant of the Word presumes a prayerful disposition and silence in order to receive the word and proclaim it to the audience. Silence and prayer are important dispositions to the hermeneutics of faith. They create a space in the heart so as to hear and encounter the living Word in the life of the Church.

Prayer and listening to the word of God is not done individually away from the Church. Augustine speaks of joint listening and understanding in communion to God made possible by the unity and

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<sup>158</sup> VD, 66.

<sup>159</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth: Meditations for Every Day of the Year*, ed. Sr. Irene Grassl, trans by Mary Frances McCarthy and Rev. Lothar Krauth, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992, 288.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>161</sup> Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 164; VD, 59.

harmony of the community. The Church is the common ground or Christological locus for listening to the Word that is made possible because the community communicate in the same ground with Christ as the Head and the Master Interpreter of the Truth.<sup>162</sup> Benedict XVI elucidates Augustine's thought and says that the greater their inner contact with the one reality which unites them, namely, the truth, the greater their capacity to meet on common ground. Dialogue without this interior obedient listening to the truth would be nothing more than a discussion among the deaf.<sup>163</sup> Ecclesial listening and understanding with the Christ of Faith as the common ground or starting point in the quest for the real Jesus are great potential not just to enrich one's faith and understanding of Jesus but also to increase the unity of believers. Listening to the living voice of Christ presupposes a transformation or conversion by assimilating the message of the speaking God in the Scriptures.

Augustine comments on John's Gospel 1:11 on the aspect of receiving the word and being recreated by the word of God. The Bishop of Hippo said, "you were created through the word, but now through the word you must be recreated."<sup>164</sup> The Lord speaks His word so that it may be received by those who were created 'through' that same Word. If one will not listen or receive the word, it leads to deformation otherwise, recreation. Not to receive Him means not to listen to His voice, not to be conformed to the Logos. To receive the Word means to let oneself be shaped by Him, and thus to be conformed by the power of the Holy Spirit to Christ. It is the beginning of a new creation; a new creature is born, a new people comes to birth.<sup>165</sup>

Benedict XVI builds the Augustinian concept of prayer as a form of quest for the real Jesus. Prayer is an exercise of the mind in search for God. It is 'prayer seeking understanding.' In the sermon of Augustine on Lk 11:9 *Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and the door will be opened.*<sup>166</sup> The reader should approach the Bible not in an academic way but with prayer.<sup>167</sup> In the hermeneutics of faith, there is an absolute need for prayer. Prayer here can mean a form of exercise of

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<sup>162</sup>See, *Serm.* 270.1.

<sup>163</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*. Translated by Adrian Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995, 34.

<sup>164</sup>*VD*, 50.

<sup>165</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup>see, *Serm.* 270.1; 163B.2

<sup>167</sup>Benedict XVI, *Questions and Answers*, 51; *VD*, 86.

the mind seeking to hear the voice of the Lord. It is not the academic or a progress in the cognitive skills. The search for Christ in the Scriptures is not purely academic but the mind must be devout in the quest for Christ. Augustine, in his sermon, says, that the assembly of believers was educated in the same locus of the School of Christ. The members, even the masters or official interpreters of the scriptures in the church (magisterium), should pay attention to the voice of the One Master, the Christ. The inquiring mind in search for the real Jesus must be guided by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by its own.<sup>168</sup> It is the Lord who moves the mind to seek the face of the Lord. It is the Christ who reveals and guides the devout mind. In the hermeneutics of faith then, the interpretation must be conducted asking what one can assimilate to grow in holiness. According to Benedict XVI,

the privileged place for the prayerful reading of sacred Scripture is the liturgy, and particularly the Eucharist, in which, as we celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament, the word itself is present and at work in our midst.<sup>169</sup>

Augustine believed that prayerful reading or listening is transformative. Benedict XVI constructs Augustine's view as regards becoming the body of Christ, the Eternal Logos who assumes the humanity and heals it into a new people of God. Benedict XVI explains the dynamic in the Eucharist shone in the vision of Augustine. Augustine had heard in a sort of vision:

Eat the bread of the strong, and yet you will not change me into yourself; rather, I will transform you into me. In other words, the bodily nourishment that we consume is assimilated by the body and itself becomes a structural component of our body. But this bread is of another sort. It is greater and more substantial than we are. We do not assimilate it into ourselves, but rather it assimilates us into itself, so that we are conformed to Christ.<sup>170</sup>

Prayerful listening in the sphere of the Christological locus involves entering into communion with Jesus Christ. The word is not something that falls into the heart of man as an idea. It moves or inspires the listener to act and participate in the community of believers that results in the communion of the body. Praying and listening to the

<sup>168</sup>*Serm.* 270.1.

<sup>169</sup>*VD*, 86.

<sup>170</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, Translated by Michael Miller, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005, 116-117.



faith in Jesus knits together believers into one body and perpetuates the Incarnation of the Logos until Christ's 'full stature' is attained.<sup>171</sup> The transformation of the believers into Christ is not exclusive to listening to the Word of God but the liturgy as a whole helps in enriching the faith of the members of the body of Christ.

### **Humility of Christ as Model**

Augustine and Benedict XVI recommend humility as another necessary condition to understand with clarity the message of God addressed to the people.<sup>172</sup> Humility enables one to perceive what is said beyond the epistemological grasp and keep one to press forward and search for the deeper reality signified by the word of God.<sup>173</sup> Those philosophers in Augustine's time, like the Platonists, style themselves as wise in their own estimation, an act of spiritual presumption based on mistaken pride (*superbia*) in their cognitive accomplishments.<sup>174</sup> There is a less significant success in their quest for Wisdom for lack of humility. Augustine considers that the greatness of the Word cannot be subjected into an experiment in a laboratory dissecting every possible meaning. He recommends an epistemic humility in order to progress in understanding the word of God. Those who wish to assimilate well the word of the Lord, admit that the Word is inexhaustible in its meaning. This conviction is contrary to what modern exegesis claim, that is, that the meaning of the word has already been explored and nothing more remains to say about it. This is the reason why for Augustine, according to Benedict XVI: "If you have understood little, admit it and do not presume that you have understood it all. The Word is always far greater than what you have been able to understand."<sup>175</sup> Benedict XVI reaffirms the mystery and greatness of the Word which is inexhaustible in meaning. Modern exegesis can only comprehend a small part of it. The immensity of the Word is a consolation to exegetes and believers for they have the limitless opportunity to discover new treasures for their faith.

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<sup>171</sup>McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Kindle Locations 5924-5927.

<sup>172</sup>Ayres, *Christology as a Contemplative Practice*, 195; Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 97; VD, 108.

<sup>173</sup> Ayres, *Christology as a Contemplative Practice*, 199.

<sup>174</sup>Kenny, "Faith and Reason," in David Merconi and Eleonor Stump, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, Kindle Edition, 284.

<sup>175</sup>Benedict XVI, *Questions and Answers*, 113.

They will rediscover new paths leading to the journey to God.<sup>176</sup> One should relearn to listen to the Scriptures with a humble disposition which was shown and materialized by the humility of God.

### **Rule of Faith and Love Seeking Understanding: Benedict XVI's Augustinian Rules**

Benedict XVI talks about God as Love. The face of this Love is Jesus Christ. He was inspired by Augustine in his quest for the Face of love by combining faith and love.<sup>177</sup> The emphasis on faith and love provides an antidote to the tendency of some scholastics, particularly the late nineteenth-century Neo-Scholastics, heavily influenced by the intellectualism of Aristotle.<sup>178</sup> The identification of faith to love is also Benedict XVI's answer to Harnack's argument on the contrast between faith and love.

'God is love' is the faith of Church that Augustine sought for in his entire life.<sup>179</sup> Like Augustine, Benedict XVI was in love with Christ, seeks to understand this profound faith ever more clearly, to discover it ever anew, and to be able to communicate what we had discovered ever more persuasively.<sup>180</sup> John Cavadini mentions the Augustinian dynamic in the search of a loving God. The *modus inveniendi* consists of the discovery of God who is love. God communicates persuasively His love through the Incarnation and moves the believer to impart (*modus proferendi*) the love of God to his fellow human beings. The quester for Christ discovers new light about God's love and shares the new understanding to someone else's heart.<sup>181</sup>

In the phase of discovery, there is a presupposition of the process of understanding the faith of the Church who speaks of Love. Cavadini adds, the voice of Christ lingers in the heart and moves it to be restless and search for understanding (to experience love) in order to engender understanding (to cause the light of God to enter the world). The assimilation of Love's voice causes the love and light of God to enter the

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>177</sup>Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, xii.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>179</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006, 19.

<sup>180</sup> see Cavadini, "Introduction," 73-84.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 63-67.

world.<sup>182</sup> Authentic understanding of the real Jesus can only be gained through the appropriation of love and sharing God's love with others and not by collection of a lifeless set of correct propositions.<sup>183</sup>

Love motivates faith to seek and understand. It seeks a face of God.<sup>184</sup> Augustine asserted that love is the desire for intimate knowledge. In Benedict XVI's words, "It is a passionate love which desires and finds joy in the beloved. Love is the eye, and to love is to see."<sup>185</sup> For Benedict XVI, love is the *eros* which stimulates the quest for the Beloved. Love connected to faith, is the moving force that culminates in the vision of God.<sup>186</sup> It is what Augustine meant when he said that seeing charity means beholding the Trinity. It is an internal disposition which moves the heart to zealously seek Christ.<sup>187</sup> Love seeking understanding is not pure critical knowing but it is an act of love entering into communion with Jesus' prayer. Love seeking understanding is not a rigorous critical knowing of the Gospel. It is not an intellectual exercise adding scholarly information about the Bible. Love seeking understanding is an internal disposition and an act of self-surrender by which one enters into the Body of Christ. It is always both love of God and love of neighbor knowing and fulfilling itself as love for the members of this Body.<sup>188</sup>

The rule of love is a participation<sup>189</sup> in the mind of Jesus that leads to the knowledge of the real Jesus. The inner disposition of love helped Augustine to transcend the soul's fallen state and help him to go

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>John Caputo, "Augustine and Post Modernism," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. by Mark Vessey, UK, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012, 493.

<sup>184</sup>Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 27; Gerard Mannion, and Lieven Boeve, eds. *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, New York: T&T Clark, 2010, Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 684-695.

<sup>185</sup>Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 55.

<sup>186</sup>Toom, *Thought Clothed*, 111.

<sup>187</sup>See, Fitzgerald, OSA. "Jesus Christ: The Knowledge and Wisdom of God," in David Merconi and Eleonor Stump, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, Kindle Edition, 110.

<sup>188</sup>Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 26.

<sup>189</sup>Augustine's idea of participation gives form in the process. Participation leads to the reception of image of God in one's life. Thus, the participation leads to advancement of understanding of God since the image of God in man becomes tangible. See Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 88, 104-5, 264.

away from the loving attachment of inferior things and his desire for God was purified.<sup>190</sup> Benedict XVI confirms the purification in the experience of Augustine. He undergoes a process of purification and illumination that results in the fruit of love.<sup>191</sup> Love is the dynamic propulsion that motivated Augustine to seek, to remain, and to persevere in the Vine that led him to knowledge of God. Love, Augustine proposed, arises from recognizing in something or someone else a pattern or form (*forma*) of justice or goodness that we already know within ourselves as the source and norm of our own judgment; we begin to understand the Trinity as we understand love.<sup>192</sup>

Faith-motivated-love purifies the organ of seeing which is the heart. There is a need for purification of the heart so that the vision of God would be possible. Faith connected to love occasions the healing of the eyes of the heart to see God. Augustine expressed it echoing the Gospel of Mt. 5:8, the *cor purum* (Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God). Augustine knew that the necessary purification of sight takes place through faith (Acts 15:9) and through love, at all events not as a result of reflection alone and not at all by man's own power.<sup>193</sup> The rule of love purifies the heart which enables one to see Christ. The pure heart is the organ for seeing God. It is a "loving heart that enters into communion of service and obedience with Jesus Christ. Love is the fire that purifies and unifies intellect, will, and emotion, thereby making man one with himself, inasmuch as it makes him one in God's eyes."<sup>194</sup> The purification results in the unity of person/s thus, vision of God follows. Love unifies the heart<sup>195</sup> and develops the interior vision with the capacity

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<sup>190</sup>See, John Peter Kenney, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity: A Study in Augustine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, Kindle Edition., 127.

<sup>191</sup>Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 262.

<sup>192</sup>Rowan Williams, *On Augustine*, London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016, Kindle Locations 3997-4001.

<sup>193</sup>McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Kindle Locations 1697-1705

<sup>194</sup>Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 95.

<sup>195</sup>Ratzinger defines heart as the "place" of the integration of the intellect, will, passions, and senses, of the body and the soul. One could say that, for Ratzinger, the human heart is the personal integration, the integration by the person, of these aspects of their human nature. The heart is the locus of saving of saving encounter with the Logos. The return to the heart is the path one can find God. See McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Kindle Locations 3720-3722; Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 68; Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 92-95.

to know or see God. Benedict XVI assimilates Augustine's interpretation of Mt. 5:8: only the pure of heart can see God. The purification of the heart means a process of conversion and assimilation of love which renders the capacity of seeing God. Augustine said, "If you see charity, you see the Trinity."<sup>196</sup> The pure heart means a lived love given by God. The love received with God's generosity molds the eyes of the heart to see God. It is the heart that must inquire after God and seek His face.<sup>197</sup> The conversion of the heart is synonymous to the healing of love.

The capacity to see Love is not a product of a philosophical exercise as practiced by the Greeks and other philosophers. The philosophers exhibit their pride in the search for Wisdom through the use of *Paideia* or philosophical discourse.<sup>198</sup> They think that by clinging to the practice of doing good and striving to hold on to wisdom they can partake of what is eternal and develop the capacity of seeing the divine. The Augustinian Benedict XVI believes that this kind of reason does not exist due to its fallen nature.<sup>199</sup> He reiterates the need for the Christ healing love. Man needs to be healed and lacks the will and power to approach the eternal God. He asserts the purified reason that is more possible to exist instead of a natural reason who by itself can perceive God. Augustine uses the image of *Christus Medicus* who heals and purifies the fallen state of man. Kenny said, it is Christ who is responsible for setting the moral foundations for the epistemic advancement of the soul. The knowledge of Christ can be described as emerging from a relation of mutual love.<sup>200</sup> The appropriation of knowledge and love of God is not a product of man's effort alone. In order to assimilate love and to be able to love truly, one needs first to be loved. One needs to appropriate the love given. It is God, who is love, who makes the first initiative by revealing his face, Christ incarnate. Christ reveals and exegetes the Father's love and in turn the readers assimilate it. In like manner, the appropriated love in one's life is an interpretation of Christ's love for humanity. The lived love becomes the sacrament signifying the love of the Father. Augustine,

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<sup>196</sup>DCE, 19; *De Trin.* VIII.8.12; Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007, 8.

<sup>197</sup>McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Kindle Locations 8320-8324.

<sup>198</sup>Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument of Continuity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 37, 39.

<sup>199</sup>McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Kindle Locations 1697-1705.

<sup>200</sup>Kenney, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity*, 76; see, Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 282-283.

taught from his own praxis of searching that anyone who thinks they have understood a biblical passage, but who has not had their love of God and other people increased by their reading of it, does not really understand Scripture at all.<sup>201</sup> The gift of love, if not translated into life, is not capable of seeing God.

The purification of the heart occurs when there is the quest for God, which seeks His face. Those who follow and inquire about Christ acquire the capacity of the vision of God. Christ is the one who can see God vis-à-vis with Him, in permanent interior discourse—in a relation of Sonship. Hence, assimilating the mind of Christ, the eyes of the heart advances in the vision of God. We will see God when we enter into the ‘mind of Christ’ (Phil 2:5). Benedict XVI asserts that purification of heart occurs as a consequence of following Christ, of becoming one with him. *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Gal 2:20).<sup>202</sup> *Cor purum* is, therefore, a result of the hermeneutic of discipleship. It is following Christ, in particular, the crucified Christ who reveals the face of love in its purity. The love of God is revealed in the giving of Himself for the sheep.

Benedict XVI acknowledges that the process of interpreting of the Scriptures results in Augustinian *cor purum*. The purified heart is the organ for the vision of the face of Christ, the transcendent referent (*Res*). Here, Benedict XVI presupposes Augustine’s problem in the quest for Christ. It is grasping the meaning of the image (sign) beyond the literal or historical meaning.<sup>203</sup> The way of purification is the avenue to the understanding of the content of the image or signs. Spiritual purification and moral purification are conditions to ascend toward an understanding of Christ. One should not stop at dissecting the meaning of external words but must go beyond it by way of hunger and thirst for righteousness.<sup>204</sup> The way of purification of the heart parallels

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<sup>201</sup>*Doc. Chr.* 1.36. 40; Stephanie Black, “Augustine’s Hermeneutics: Back to the Future for ‘Spiritual’ Bible Interpretation?,” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 27/1 (2008), 26.

<sup>202</sup>Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 95.

<sup>203</sup>Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990, 4.

<sup>204</sup>Benedicts XVI believes that a pure heart entail man’s refusal to deceive or commit perjury; this requires honesty, truthfulness, and justice toward one’s fellow men and toward the community. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 95-96.

Augustine's sevenfold stages that lead the heart to grasp the transcendent meaning of the Scriptures.<sup>205</sup>

The *cor purum* stems also from following of the humble God. Benedict XVI follows the Augustinian assertion on the need for humility to advance in the knowledge of Christ. The divine humility of the Son of God provided a concrete model<sup>206</sup> for becoming an authentic human being. It is also the model in one's approach to God. The humility of Christ teaches that the real growth in one's knowledge of God is through the way of the humble faith in Christ rather than the proud way of reason.<sup>207</sup> Christ is the humble mediator who teaches humans to be like him in humility. The Incarnation is the descent of love and the healing of human love which makes the heart pure. Benedict XVI, like Augustine, says that the one whose heart is pure follows Christ's humility. Pope Benedict XVI said:

The ascent to God occurs precisely in the descent of humble service, in the descent of love, for love is God's essence, and is thus the power that truly purifies man and enables him to perceive God and to see him. In Jesus Christ, God has revealed himself in his descending: 'Though he was in the form of God,' he 'did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.... He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him' (Phil 2:6-9).<sup>208</sup>

The descent of love heals the human love, making it see Jesus Christ, the face of Love. The restless heart ascends to God by accompanying him on this descending path, humility.<sup>209</sup> The purity of heart, as following of Christ in dialogue with the Father and in his humility, demands perseverance or remaining in Christ. The process of purification requires patient steadfastness in communion with the Lord amid all the vicissitudes of life. Augustine emulated this kind of

<sup>205</sup> See, Schüssler, Fiorenza and Galvin eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, 9.

<sup>206</sup> Albert Verwilghen, "Jesus Christ: the Source of Christian Humility," in Pamela Bright, ed trans., *Augustine and the Bible*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, 303.

<sup>207</sup> Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 35, 85; Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 254.

<sup>208</sup> Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 95.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

perseverance and purification which bears the fruit of love enabling in him a vision of God. Benedict XVI narrates:

After the brilliant illuminations of the initial moment of his conversion, Augustine had a profound experience of this toilsome patience, and that is how he learned to love the Lord and to rejoice deeply at having found him.<sup>210</sup>

The fruit the Lord expects of us is love, a love that accepts with Him the mystery of the Cross, and becomes a participation in His self-giving.

Benedict XVI builds Augustine's understanding of love seeking understanding as a gift. "It is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us."<sup>211</sup> Benedict XVI comments on love as a gift of the Father which carries one toward God.<sup>212</sup> Love is no longer a burden or command but a gift and a response to God's love by following Christ. Instead of Augustine seeking God, the loving God also seeks and wanted to be discovered, to be experienced, and to be loved. Augustine admitted, addressing God directly, "you were more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me," (Conf. III.6.11); and in another passage remembering the period before his conversion: "you were there before me, but I had departed from myself. I could not even find myself, much less you."<sup>213</sup> God seeks man and communicates His love even into the present. He is not a distant and impersonal God. Benedict XVI sees Augustine's theology of the interior life as God who awaits man in the depths of man's being, Augustine's experience of God being closer to man than man is to himself, that man knows himself and God by accomplishing a return to himself, into his own inner depths, away from self-estrangement among things.<sup>214</sup> The discovery of God or God discovering man means the revelation of the authentic self, the true image of God in man. As Augustine confessed: "Let me know you, O you who know me; then shall I know even as I am known."<sup>215</sup> Benedict XVI links such kind of knowing to Augustinian maxim '*Credo*

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., 262.

<sup>211</sup>DCE, 1.

<sup>212</sup>Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 95.

<sup>213</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Fathers of the Church: From Clement of Rome to Augustine of Hippo*, 146-148; Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, 24; LF, 9.

<sup>214</sup>McGregor, *Heart to Heart: The Spiritual Christology of Joseph Ratzinger*, Kindle Locations 1666-1676.

<sup>215</sup>Conf. X.1.1; see Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*, 30, 35.



*ut intelligam.*’ One has to accept what is revealed to him/her in advance. It is a kind of pre-understanding of true self, revealed in the Incarnation. The search must begin in such a pre-understanding in order to trek the path to the right way of living and to the right way of understanding oneself.<sup>216</sup> In reality, it is God in the Incarnation of the Word who reveals the true image of humans. It is God who actually interprets man, as such, it should be discovered. God exegetes man in the revelation of the face of love, Jesus Christ.

The Rule of Love served as a hermeneutical control when seeking to understand the real Jesus. Hermeneutics of love should always be both love of God and love of neighbor, knowing and fulfilling itself as love for the members of the Body of Christ.<sup>217</sup> The love-filled hearing of the word of God should be translated into gestures of love and should promote love of God and selfless service to other people.<sup>218</sup> The growth in charity is an indication of understanding the meaning of the Scriptures and Christ, who is love. The increase of twin love in man’s heart guarantees a sound interpretation of the Bible and the correct understanding of Jesus Christ.

As Augustine says: It is essential to realize that love is the fullness of the Law, as it is of all the divine Scriptures.... Whoever claims to have understood the Scriptures, or any part of them, without striving as a result to grow in this twofold love of God and neighbor, makes it clear that he has not yet understood them.<sup>219</sup>

Benedict XVI’s hermeneutics of love is the ultimate referent, the practical outcome, and the formal principle of discernment in the ecclesial activity of Biblical interpretation.<sup>220</sup>

## ***Totus Christus* Way of Reading**

### **Augustine: Reading Like Christ**

The exercise of the mind from material to the spiritual, the knowledge of Hebrew, Latin and Greek, familiarity with the Bible, knowledge of liberal arts, the ability to discern the meaning of res (literal

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<sup>216</sup>Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 70.

<sup>217</sup>Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 26.

<sup>218</sup>Black, “Augustine’s Hermeneutics,” 3, 22.

<sup>219</sup>VD, 102; *Doc Chr.* 1.36. (40); Black, “Augustine’s Hermeneutics,” 26.

<sup>220</sup>Derek Simon, “Ad Regnum Caritatis: The Finality of Biblical Interpretation in Augustine and Ricoeur,” *Augustinian Studies* 30/1 (1999), 118.

and figurative) through the *signum*, and so on, demand intelligence and education. It somehow supports the *Paideia* of the Greeks in the quest for Christ. If this is the only way to know Christ, then the method of reading will just be exclusive to biblical scholars. Augustine knew the importance of faith in seeking understanding. He saw his mother Monica, though not educated, was given the privilege to enjoy the vision of God. Augustine's concern was to give the simple folks or uneducated the hope to grow in the knowledge and love of God. Augustine believed that simple believers could have access to the vision of God.

In lieu of this problem, the Bishop of Hippo developed the ecclesial dimension of hermeneutics, the *Totus-Christus* way of reading. For Augustine, the quest for Christ should be grounded in the Scripture and the Church. He said that the Church is not just the institutional arbiter of Scripture; it constitutes the collective life of souls who jointly know God.<sup>221</sup> The church is the locus where the training of both intellectuals and uneducated can make them become scholars of Christ. The possibility of the sharing of the common knowledge of the divinity of Christ became a reality because of the Word made flesh. Gerald Bonner explains Augustine's view on this assertion saying,

Christ assumes humanity, he took the flesh of human being. Manhood is ennobled by union with the Godhead through the divine act of the humility and without any merit and it is because of this union of sinless manhood with the divinity that it becomes possible for fallen man, by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, to become a partaker of divinity in the Body of Christ.<sup>222</sup>

The reader should partake of the divinity of Christ so that he or she could see the Son of God. This is based on the maxim that like knows like. One cannot see the Christ if He is absent in one's mind and heart. One cannot see Jesus if you do not have Jesus. We can say here the principle of seeing with the visible Christ the invisible Christ. This joint process of knowing the Body of Christ is called the divinization, becoming Christ.<sup>223</sup> According to David Vincent Merconi, Augustine

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<sup>221</sup>*Conf.* 13.34.49; Kenny, *Faith and Reason*, 289.

<sup>222</sup>Gerald Bonner, "Christ, God and Man in the Thought of St. Augustine," *Angelicum* 61 (1984), 270; see. Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 261.

<sup>223</sup>See Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 369-386.

deviated from the thinking of the Donatist exegete Tyconius and asserted that Christ is a speaking God who communicates both as Head and Body, the whole Christ who is the fullness of his church. This “whole Christ” is precisely the manner by which Christians become Christ, how the Incarnation not only unites all human persons into Christ but allows them to find their truest identity in Him as well. The *Totus Christus* is, therefore, the way the Son

unites us into one body with himself and makes us his members, so that in him we too are Christ... From this it is obvious that we are the body of Christ, being all anointed. In him all of us belong to Christ, but we are Christ too because in some sense the whole Christ is Head and body.<sup>224</sup>

In the same way, Cameron sees the “Christification” in the perspective of *Totus Christus*. The joint process of knowing Christ changes the horizon of interpreter. He asserts the principle of reading as Christ. Being part of the *Totus Christus* alters the way Christians read the ancient text of Israel, by learning that the head is not only the Redeemer of the body but also the Master interpreter of the Scripture. Christ teaches and inspires the members of His Body to learn to read the Scriptures by way of imitating Christ. Reading like Christ means following and imitating Christ.<sup>225</sup>

In the context of hermeneutics of love, Augustine preached not only to provide an environment of hearing the Scripture speak of Christ, but he too stirred the spiritual love so that the body’s members might read the Law as he read it.<sup>226</sup> Learning to read like Christ presupposes the art of listening to the Master Exegete eloquently speaking to the body. It is like a child who begins to imitate the language of the parents but later on begins to make one’s own language and speak and argue with the parents. The reader must first humbly listen to the eloquent speaking God in the school of Christ (*Schola Christi*), the Church. For Augustine one should open one’s mind and heart to the single discourse

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<sup>224</sup>David Vincent Merconi, S.J., “Augustine’s Doctrine of Deification,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Augustine*. eds C.C. Pecknold and Tarmo Toom, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013, 223-224; see. Michael Cameron, “Enarrationes in Psalmos,” in *Augustine Through the Ages*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, et al. (Cambridge: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999): 290-296.

<sup>225</sup>Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 287-289.

<sup>226</sup>*Ibid.*, 288.

of God [*Unus Sermo Dei*] amplified through all the Scriptures. The *Unus Sermo Dei* can be heard by many holy persons.<sup>227</sup> Augustine is one of the many official interpreters of the Scriptures who taught and preached in the *Schola Christi*. In the Church, Augustine's sermons served for simple folks (*parvuli*),<sup>228</sup> as a form of *lectio divina* or spiritual exercises which led the little ones' to the advancement in their knowledge of Christ. The Sermons preached in the assembly of believers give the *Parvuli* access to Christ as Wisdom. This gave the *Parvuli* who could not read and uneducated a chance to become a scholar of Christ.<sup>229</sup> The members of the body learned from the Incarnation of Christ, in particular the Paschal mystery. Augustine, with the intention to stir spiritual love, not only gave information about Christ, but also motivated the believers to perform what was preached to them. The purpose of the spiritual exercises was to actualize the union between believer and Christ within consciousness, and to provoke responsive love. The union attached the believer to the flesh of Christ that was joined and, therefore, in a sense ascended to the divinity of Christ.<sup>230</sup> This process of unification between the believer and Christ is analogical to the putting on of Christ. The believers should learn to wear the words of Christ in their life of faith. Cameron comments that Augustine worked hard to dress his hearers in each text's words, grammar, thought patterns, and dynamics, and to help people find their own voices in them. The believers learned to read in the process of assimilation of Augustine's preaching of Christ's 'flesh.' The believers not only read the Bible's word about Christ the Head: they lived as Christ inside these words and so spoke Scripture with the warmth of Christ's own self-understanding.<sup>231</sup>

The *Schola Christi* of Augustine's audience in the liturgy can be considered as a Christological locus, the center of everything that happened: the Christological interpretation of the Scriptures, the renewal of the sacrifice of Christ, the actualization of the Mystery of Christ in the Church, the initiation and participation of Christians, their incorporation into Christ, their spiritual edification (in the strongest

<sup>227</sup>*En. Ps.* 103.4.1; Cameron, "Enarrationes in Psalmos," 291; Cameron, *Augustine and Scripture*, 202.

<sup>228</sup>*Parvuli* were Augustine's hearers. They are infant believers suckling by faith before nursery book pictures that God drew in the Bible. In Cameron, "Totus Christus and the Psychagogy of Augustine's Sermons," 61.

<sup>229</sup>Michael Cameron, "Totus Christus and the Psychagogy of Augustine's Sermons," *Augustinian Studies* 36/1 (2005), 67.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>231</sup>Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere*, 289.

sense), the faith and understanding of the faith.<sup>232</sup> The emphasis here is the transformation of the assembly in the Eucharist into the body of Christ. For Augustine, according to Tarsicius van Bavel, the body of Christ can take three meanings namely: the body of Christ received from Mary, the Eucharistic body which he gave us at his last supper, and the body of Christ that is formed by believers. The three meanings are closely interconnected and cannot be separated from each other. Christ's Eucharistic body refers to the climax of his life on earth as self-giving for others. The purpose of the Eucharist is that we become more and more Christ's body.<sup>233</sup> Augustine saw a vision of Christ telling him to eat his body in order to be transformed by Christ into himself. Augustine confessed: "I seemed to hear your voice from on high: "I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me."<sup>234</sup> Augustine explained that the food taken is processed into nutrients and calories, which, in turn, were absorbed by the body. But the Eucharistic body works the other way around. The one who eats the body of Christ in the liturgical assembly becomes Christ. Augustine preached to the assembly of believers who were about to receive the Eucharist, that if they received with devotion the body and blood of Christ which they see on the Altar of the Lord, they would become what they received, the body of Christ.<sup>235</sup> The liturgy of the Eucharist, then is a Christological locus, where one can grow in the knowledge and love of Christ. The knowledge of Christ is communally constructed.<sup>236</sup> It is a product of the relationship with Christ the Head and the members of the body of Christ. The reader's understanding of Christ is a product of the *Totus-Christus* reading of the Scriptures. In the preaching, for example, the assembly was trained to interpret the Scriptures and to follow Christ's incarnated love and humility. The multifaceted Christological understanding of the readings in the liturgical assembly was reinterpreted and en-fleshed and thus sheds light on the Mystery of Christ. The relationship with the Head, the Son of God and with the members of the Body of Christ is a necessary

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<sup>232</sup>Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 263-265.

<sup>233</sup>van Bavel, OSA. *The "Christus Totus" Idea*, 68.

<sup>234</sup>*Conf.* VII.10.16.

<sup>235</sup>*Serm.* 227.

<sup>236</sup>David Vincent Merconi, SJ., "Heaven and the ecclesia perfecta in Augustine," in David Merconi and Eleonor Stump, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014, Kindle Edition, 253.

condition to grow in the understanding of faith. The incorporation and assimilation of the faith within the Christological locus transports one to a deeper knowledge of the divinity of Christ.

### **Benedict XVI: Reading like Christ**

The quest for Christ cannot be purely academic. There is another way to search for Christ which is more reasonable and must be given importance because it will nourish faith in Christ and can lead to discovery of one's true life, happiness. It is a path to the mysteries or the authority of the Mystery. Benedict XVI says that the quest for the real Jesus must begin in faith and should be done in the Christological locus, the Church. Faith seeking understanding in the Church resounds in the experience of Augustine where he learned to read the Bible anew with the guidance of the Church. Augustine's faith was shaken to the point of almost losing it due to listening to the intellectuals who interpreted the Bible apart from the authority of the Church. As such, it is similar to the 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars who lost their faith due to the overemphasis of the power of reason and marginalization of faith. In the light of Augustine's first unsuccessful reading experience with the reading of the Scriptures, one can appreciate more fully his later insistence on prayerful and ecclesial reading, carried out in faith and contemplation.<sup>237</sup> He said that the Church is not just the institutional arbiter of Scripture; it constitutes the collective life of souls who jointly know God.<sup>238</sup> The Church is the locus where the training of both intellectuals and uneducated can become scholars of Christ.

The Church is the interpretative community who is the authority and recipient of the Word of God. Benedict XVI believed that the Church is the seat of faith in Christ. The Body of Christ is the locus of God's self-disclosure.<sup>239</sup> The speaking God reveals His face in the incarnation of the Son of God. Thus, the Church bears the revelation and *Regula Fidei*. She is the living voice who teaches and guides her members. Christ speaks to the community of believers and the interpretative community gives expressions to what they heard from the living voice.

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<sup>237</sup>Bertrand de Margerie, *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis III St. Augustine*, translated by Pierre de Fontnouvelle, Massachusetts: St. Bede's Publications, 1991, 11.

<sup>238</sup>*Conf.* 13.34.49; Kenny, *Faith and Reason*, 289.

<sup>239</sup>Francesca Aran Murphy, "Papal Ecclesiology," in John C. Cavadini, ed. *Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI*, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012, Kindle Locations 4104-5641.

The School of Christ is the historical living subject, the center of faith, where the narrative of God's actions is deposited. It is the subject of God's communication. Hahn describes Benedict XVI's view on the Church as a subject.

The Church is the living voice, the *viva vox*, of the Word of God. As the living, historical subject addressed by the divine Word that also bears witness to its encounter with the Word in history, the Church serves as a sort of collective memory for humankind, providing a unifying narrative for human history. Benedict speaks of the *memoria Ecclesiae*, the memory of the Church, the Church as memory. As the living voice of the Word, the Church bears the memory of God's saving acts in history, most decisively the event of Christ's descent from heaven and entrance into history.<sup>240</sup>

Augustine applied the conception of the School of Christ as a subject in his preaching. The *Schola Christi* of Augustine's audience in the liturgy can be considered as a Christological locus. It is the center of everything that happened: the Christological interpretation of the Scriptures, the renewal of the sacrifice of Christ, the actualization of the Mystery of Christ in the Church, the initiation and participation of Christians, their incorporation into Christ, their spiritual edification (in the strongest sense), the faith and understanding of the faith.<sup>241</sup> The School of Christ is the place where one can be immersed in the authority of the 'mysteries.' The believers in the Church experience the deep connection between the God who speaks in the Scriptures and, through the sacraments, the living voice, 'Word of God,' recreating the believer. Benedict XVI believes that the believers must learn to attune themselves to the voice of Christ speaking in the Church. It is the Word addressed to the School of Christ which will form the identity of the believers.<sup>242</sup> The Church, in the particular Christ as priest, gives voice to the Word. The members of the body of Christ, and in particular, the priest, receive the Word (Christ) and give voice to the preaching or proclamation of the Word of God.<sup>243</sup> The proclamation of the Word in the Church resulted in the shaping of the identity of the followers of Christ. The people of God then became a *viva vox* (living voice) of the Word of God.<sup>244</sup> The

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<sup>240</sup>Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 50.

<sup>241</sup>Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 263-265.

<sup>242</sup>Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, xxi.

<sup>243</sup>Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*,

<sup>244</sup>Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 50.

process of hearing the voice of the Word of God in the Church starting from creation, to the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, to the incarnation, passion and resurrection in the New Testament, and the preaching, teaching and sacraments of the Church into the present, gives vitality to the *viva vox*.<sup>245</sup> The living voice is the hermeneutical control in discerning the accurate translation of the text. The memory of the Church is the norm to distinguish between the heretic interpretation of the Bible and the true meaning of it.<sup>246</sup>

Hahn asserts that “God’s Word is living and active and possesses the power to bring into being what it commands.” Creation and recreation are the work of the Word, Jesus.<sup>247</sup> The immersion of the believer in the mysteries, through the sacraments, effects a recreation or reformation that leads to the communion of believers with the God who has chosen to reveal himself in Scripture. The participation in sacramental worship confirms the faith of the believers and engenders their faith in Christ. For Augustine the communal reading and listening to the voice of Christ is a spiritual exercise of the body of Christ.<sup>248</sup> It is an exercise of the Church of understanding herself as the body of Christ by reading the Scriptures.<sup>249</sup> Hence, the entering into the Church is a path of understanding oneself as a member of the body of Christ. The School of Christ is the place to learn to read like Christ, understand like Christ, see like Christ and become like Christ.

### Reading in Fellowship with the Church

Benedict XVI builds his idea of Church as communion from *Lumen Gentium*’s description of the Church as a sacrament of God.<sup>250</sup> He asserts that the Church is a sacrament since, “she is God’s communing

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<sup>245</sup>See, Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*, 102; see. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 50.

<sup>246</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, Translated by Adrian Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996,

<sup>247</sup>Scott Hanh, “Worship in the Word: Toward a Liturgical Hermeneutic,” in <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/569543b4bfe87360795306d6/t/569906daa2bab8378c7b67ae/1452869339505/worship+in+the+word.pdf>/accessed/April302018.p 134-135.

<sup>248</sup>Cameron, *Totus Christus and the Psychagogy*,” 60.

<sup>249</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>250</sup>Murphy, *Papal Ecclesiology*, Kindle Loc., 4115- 5116.



with men and hence the communion of men with each other.”<sup>251</sup> The Church as sacrament parallels Augustine’s concept on the relationship of sign and reality in which the sign produces the signified. The bishop of Hippo asserts the body of Christ is a holy sign which partakes of the meaning of the sign. The Church as a holy sign has a role of leading the people to its signification, the body of Christ as a place of love and the Trinitarian love. Benedict XVI elaborates that the Augustinian meaning of sacrament is equivalent to the holy sign. The body of Christ, as a Sign, responsibly leads the believer to ascend toward the greater things signified by the Church. The flesh of Christ (*signum or sacramentum*) ushers the quester to go beyond the sign and ascend to the spiritual reality of the divinity of Christ (*Res*). It is when the ‘signified’ is realized, the Church becomes the sign of God’s presence in the world.<sup>252</sup> The members of the body of Christ also become signs of love or the body of Christ, a living sign of God’s love.

The Body of Christ is the school of love where one learns to love the face of Love. It is also the place of healing human love.<sup>253</sup> The inter-human enjoyment in reference to the love of God, must move toward the communion of Love, the Trinity. The body of Christ must progress in love toward the City of God. It is a movement from earthly community to heavenly communion. It is the love exercise in the community that leads to the enjoyment of the vision of God.

The Church, as a sign, is not just an idea or a body of knowledge that must be recognized or scrutinized. The quester for Christ should not see the Church as a repository of knowledge but a way which guides the members to the reality it signifies. The way to the transcendent referent demands the entrance into the ‘We’ of the Church. Ascent to the *Res* requires an interaction with the sign. In the experience of Augustine the ascent to God cannot come into reality by just contemplating an idea but there is need to enter into the way. One must enter into the community’s worship of God and the fellowship with the Church.<sup>254</sup> There is a need to enter into the relationship in the prayer of the Church to be led into the knowledge of Christ. The participation in the worship of the Church, especially the Eucharist, directs the people’s gaze to God (*Res*). It “draws them into the descent of God to humanity, which becomes

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<sup>251</sup>Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 53.

<sup>252</sup>Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, Kindle Locations, 591-600.

<sup>253</sup>Murphy, *Papal Ecclesiology*, Kindle Loc., 4115- 5116.

<sup>254</sup>Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 98-100.

their ascent into fellowship with God.”<sup>255</sup> The Sign-body of Christ for Augustine is the path toward the ascent to the Divinity of Christ. To rise to the Divinity of Christ, one needs to cling to the image of the flesh of Christ. The spiritual ascent then requires an inquiry into what is visible (sign) in order to progress in the understanding of what is invisible. Ascent to Christ demands a faith conviction regarding the existence of the Invisible Christ. Augustine exhorted his listeners to “observe what you can see and seek what you cannot see. Believe in the one whom you cannot see, on account of these things which you can.”<sup>256</sup> This affirms the sacramental vision of the material that points beyond itself leading to what is spiritual. Thus the Church is a holy sign pointing to the reality of Jesus Christ. Ployd utilizes Augustine’s thought saying: The flesh of Christ is like a raft to which we cling as we journey through this world’s sea to the homeland of God, suggestive of the image of the Church as a boat.<sup>257</sup> To enter into the life of the Church then means entering into the flesh of Christ leading to the window of seeing the divinity of Christ. Here instead of seeing the flesh of Christ as hindrance to the knowledge of the Divinity of Christ, it becomes a sign which has the task of pointing to the divinity of Christ.

### Liturgical Hermeneutic

In the School of Christ one can learn the prayer of Jesus. Such prayer reveals that the heart of the Trinity is a familial, filial relationship of love. God in his inner essence is a dialogue of love, and our prayer, both corporately in the liturgy and privately, is a participation in this filial and familial dialogue.<sup>258</sup> The participation in this familial dialogue effects the healing of love or the assimilation of the Trinitarian love which enables one to see in charity the Trinity.<sup>259</sup> Benedict XVI sees this dialogue of love in the filial relationship of the Father and the Son. For Benedict XVI, we can know the Son if we see Him at prayer. “It is only by participating in what is most personal to him, his communication with the Father, can one see what this most personal reality is; only thus

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<sup>255</sup>Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, 94.

<sup>256</sup>*Serm.* 126.3.

<sup>257</sup>Adam Ployd, *Trinity and Church in Augustine’s Anti-Donatist Sermons (406-407)*, Dissertation: Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University, 2013, 64.

<sup>258</sup>Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 146.

<sup>259</sup>SC, 8.

can one penetrate to His identity.”<sup>260</sup> The participation in the dialogue of the Father and Jesus is an avenue to know Jesus, the Son of God. It is in one’s participation in the prayer of the Church, which is the prayer of Jesus, that the knowledge of God can progress. Therefore, it is in the school of Christ where we can learn more about the Lord Jesus because in the Church, Jesus prays. The prayer exercise within the community of believers involves the appropriation of the voice of Christ in the participation of the liturgy. The assimilation of the prayer of Jesus means the growing understanding of Christ.

It is important to enter into the Church, the body of Christ, which is praying. The entrance to the body of Christ ignites the transformation of the ‘I’ into the ‘we’ of the Church. The ‘I’ is transformed “by entering into the ‘we’ of the Church, enriching and enlarging this ‘I,’ praying with the Church, with the words of the Church, truly being in conversation with God.”<sup>261</sup> This transposition of the ‘I’ to ‘we’ alludes to Augustine’s concept of marvelous exchange. Christ transposed us into himself. It is Christ who assumed the ‘I’ of the perishing Adam. The Son of God, the powerful human-divine ‘Ego’ is joined to Adam to become one person. It is a displacement of the Adam-ego by the Christ-Ego.<sup>262</sup> Jesus imparts his own ‘I’ to humanity, His own identity to man, which transforms man into God.<sup>263</sup> The sharing of Jesus’ identity is similar to the vision of Augustine in the Eucharist wherein Jesus gives his body to be assimilated by man. The process of consuming the Eucharistic bread transforms man into the Body of Christ.

### **Church: Eucharistic Body**

Augustine envisioned the transformation of the believer into love through true sacrifice. It is a sacrifice patterned after the self-giving of Christ on the Cross, which is the Divine humility disclosing to men the way to becoming a true sacrifice. Basil Studer explains Augustine’s thought. Pride and arrogance are obstacles in the transformation to love. Pride resists the performance of the dual charity. It is only humility that can resist pride and lead to the conversion to love. God had to humiliate himself to reopen the way to love.<sup>264</sup> Sacrifice involves the

<sup>260</sup>Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 19.

<sup>261</sup>Benedict XVI, *Questions and Answers*, 84-85.

<sup>262</sup>Cameron, *Totus Christus and the Psychagogy*, 64-65.

<sup>263</sup>Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 41.

<sup>264</sup>Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church*,

transformation of man in conformity with God. The transformation involves the abolition of pride which is the cause of alienation from God. The union with God means following the humble Christ. The human being becomes “conformed to God when he becomes love. (It is a love that leads man to God and neighbor). That is why, true sacrifice is every work which allows us to unite ourselves to God in a holy fellowship.” It is the abolition of difference—in the union between God and man.<sup>265</sup> Benedict XVI explains this Augustinian sacrifice as participation in the prayer of Jesus, the Eucharistic prayer. Sacrifice as a transformation into love<sup>266</sup> consists of entering into the “prayer of Jesus, hence it is the Church’s entering-in to the Logos, the Father’s Word, into the Logos’ self-surrender to the Father, which, in the Cross, has also become the surrender of mankind to him.”<sup>267</sup> Sacrifice is the joining of the offering of one’s heart and mind—to the self-offering of the Word, the Logos, who became flesh in order to offer himself, flesh and blood, to the Father. The participation in the prayer of Jesus means the imitation of His self-giving. Those who struggle to be members of the body of Christ allow the self-giving of Christ to become the handing over of themselves back to God. The process of becoming love is assimilating the face of love who gives himself to man overcoming the difference between God and man. The end of this participation of self-giving of the members of the body of Christ is the City of God. “That is why Augustine could say that the true ‘sacrifice’ is the *Civitas Dei*, that is, love-transformed mankind, the divinization of creation and the surrender of all things to God: God all in all.”<sup>268</sup> The transformation into love is brought about by the participation in the Eucharist of the Church. For Augustine, the Eucharist is the *sacramentum* of the true *sacrificium*: the sacred sign in which that which

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ed. Andrew Louth, trans. Matthias Westerhoff, London: T&T Clark, 2002, 179, 181; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. by John Saward, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000, 192.

265Thornton, John, and Varenne, Susan, *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, Introduction by Vincent D. Twomey, Harper ECollins Ebooks, 148-149.

<sup>266</sup>Sacrificium means union with God. True Sacrifice is love. In Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation*, 180; *De Civ.*, X,6; Thornton, and Varenne, *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 313.

<sup>267</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast Of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. Graham Harrison, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986, 37-38; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 178.

<sup>268</sup>Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 28; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 120.

is signified is produced.<sup>269</sup> The Eucharist is the sacred sign in which the face of love which is signified is produced. Eucharist is a sign of God's presence among men and as such signification becomes a reality. Hence the participation in the Eucharist is a process of divinization of man. That is why Augustine said, that we become what we eat, the body of Christ. We are Christs.

The communion with the body of Christ brings about the abolition of the difference between God and man. The space or alienation that separates man from God is gradually overcome. The sacrifice of Christ becomes one's sacrifice. That is, the believers join Jesus in His prayer, in His act of worship, in His sacrificial offering of His whole self, His body and blood, to His Father. Jesus made it possible for all peoples to enter into the dialogue with the Father. Thus, this intimate personal relationship with the Father brings about the revelation of God in history.<sup>270</sup> Jesus Christ, the true Sacrifice, becomes a reality, a revelation to the world. The members of the body of Christ become signs of God's love to the world. As a body of Christ, they become the place of love and sacred sign of Emmanuel, God with us. This is made possible by "becoming one with Christ through our own prayer of love, our own act of surrendering our lives in prayer to God."<sup>271</sup> Benedict XVI said that it is "only by participating in what is most personal to him, his communication with the Father, that can one see what this most personal reality is; only thus can one penetrate to his identity."<sup>272</sup> The relationship with Christ in his Body is thus a process of building the place of love, the City of God. This is the way to understand him and to grasp what following Jesus means.

The building of the City of God can become a reality in the participation in the Eucharist.<sup>273</sup> Augustine insisted that the participation in the Eucharist brings about the transformation into love and the world

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<sup>269</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, New York: Paulist Press, 1966, Kindle Locations 591-600; Thornton, and Varenne, *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 151.

<sup>270</sup>Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 145.

<sup>271</sup>Ibid.

<sup>272</sup>Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One*, 19.

<sup>273</sup>Some of the Church Fathers described the Eucharist simply as "prayer", as the "sacrifice" of praise, as a spiritual sacrifice, which, however, also becomes material and transforms matter: bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, the new food that nourishes us until the resurrection, for eternal life. In Ratzinger, *On The Way To Jesus*, 111.

into a place of love. This is possible not because one assimilates the body of Christ in the reception of the Eucharist. It is Christ who assimilates the community of believers into Himself. In the participation in the Eucharist, Christ assumes the members of the community of believers in a certain way which conforms them into Himself. The Word assumes the humanity into Himself thus making the people of God His body.<sup>274</sup> The taking of the eternal Son of the flesh is the pattern of Christ assimilating the body, which implies the healing of love transforming it into the place of love. The authentic reception of Christ' body and blood should lead to union with God and neighbor. The love of God and neighbor is proof of the transformation into love or into the Body of Christ. Benedict XVI elaborates further the vision of Augustine:

Eat me; I am the bread of the strong.' Jesus is saying here that it is the opposite to how it is with ordinary food that your body assimilates. That food is lesser than you, so that it becomes part of your body. And in my case, it is the other way around: I assimilate you into me. I am the stronger; you will be assimilated into me. This is, as we said, a personal process. Man, if he abandons himself in receiving this, is in his turn received. He is made like Christ, made to resemble Christ. And that is what is really happening in Communion, that we allow ourselves to be drawn into him, into his inner communion, and are thus led finally into a state of inner resemblance.<sup>275</sup>

Christ assimilates us to himself: 'The bread you see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. The chalice, or rather, what the chalice contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. In these signs, Christ the Lord willed to entrust to us his body and the blood which he shed for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have received them properly, you yourselves are what you have received.' Consequently, 'not only have we become Christians, we have become Christ himself.' We can thus contemplate God's mysterious work, which brings about a profound unity between ourselves and the Lord Jesus: 'one should not believe that Christ is in the head but not in the body; rather he is complete in the head and in the body.'<sup>276</sup>

<sup>274</sup>Ratzinger, *On The Way To Jesus*, 116-117; Thornton, and Varenne, *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 76-77.

<sup>275</sup>Benedict XVI and Peter Seewald, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002, 408-409.

<sup>276</sup>SC, 36.

The dynamic of faith in the Eucharist reveals the divinization of humans made possible by the self-giving of Christ to humanity. The deification of humans is the *Totus Christus* exercise in which the Son unites us into one body with Himself and makes us His members, so that in Him we too are Christ. From this it is obvious that we are the Body of Christ, being all anointed. In Him all of us belong to Christ, but we are Christ too because in some sense the whole Christ is Head and Body. Cameron says that *Totus Christus* is a training ground for Christian *exercitatio* within the comprehensive unity of love, in which the listeners dwell within, not the words of the Bible, but to the speaking Ego of the Bible who is Christ. They learn His words as their own words, words they understand with a warm intimacy of the truth, as it were Christ's own understanding.<sup>277</sup>

## Hermeneutics of Ascent: Seeking the Face of Christ

### Material to the Spiritual

Benedict XVI follows Augustine's hermeneutics of ascent in his quest for the real Jesus. The general feature of such hermeneutics of ascent is the pilgrimage of the mind from the material level to the spiritual level. This ascent is a movement that draws man away from what is opposed to God. The material level can be the point of departure or a sign that paves the way to upward movement of the quester. The hermeneutical ascent presupposes that spiritual meaning of the text is based on a historical event of the Bible. The biblical faith does not symbolize supra-historical truths, but is based on history, history that took place here on this earth. The historical fact (material basis) is not an interchangeable symbolic cipher for biblical faith, but the foundation on which it stands: *Et incarnatus est*—when we say these words, we acknowledge God's actual entry into real history.<sup>278</sup>

Augustine discovered, with the influence of Ambrose and Origen, the exercise of the mind from the letter to the spirit. Benedict XVI used the term theory of spiritualization for this kind of ascent from the material to the spirit in his book *Feast of Faith*.<sup>279</sup> In the mind of Benedict XVI, Augustine will definitely oppose those who interpret the word of God

<sup>277</sup>Cameron, "Totus Christus and the Psychagogy," 67; see, Thornton, and Varenne, *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI*, 148-149.

<sup>278</sup>Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan*, xv.

<sup>279</sup>See, Ratzinger, *The Feast Of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, 110-111.

only in the material or historical level, those modern scholars who treat the text as sources of historiography or literary history.<sup>280</sup> Augustine saw the need to transcend the letter in his search for Christ. The word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text. The quest for Christ, starting from the letter to the spirit, is guided by the Spirit of Christ. It is Christ the Lord who reveals the way. This was dramatically demonstrated in the life of Augustine, the very process of transcending the letter. For Augustine, according to Benedict XVI, transcending the literal sense made the letter itself credible, and enabled him to find at last the answer to his deep inner restlessness and his thirst for truth.<sup>281</sup>

### Ascent to Worship

Augustine's hermeneutics of ascent differs from the *Paideia* of the Greek philosophers which relies mainly on the power of reason. It is more of an academic or philosophical exercise, which attempts to trek the path to wisdom. Augustine saw the limits of reason in its ascensional movement to the Truth due to its fallen nature. In the same way Benedict XVI assimilates Augustine's hermeneutic of ascent by positing the limits of reason without faith. He rejects the claim of positivism in its quest for the real Jesus by disregarding the Christ of faith. Benedict XVI sees Augustine asserting that the quest for the real Jesus is not just an academic affair but also the combination of faith and love which plays an essential role in the quest for Christ. In the experience of Augustine, his spiritual ascent was not stimulated by the intellectual exercise but was ignited by his participation in the worship of the Church. He admits that the movement of his mind to God was occasioned by music and liturgy. It led Augustine to seek beyond what was signified by music. It is not solely the intellectual exercise, which compelled Augustine to seek Christ, the liturgy, and the music and the piety of the people which played a role in his quest for Christ.<sup>282</sup> Benedict comments, "it was the singing

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<sup>280</sup>See, Chadwick, *Augustine*, 86; See Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, 105, 122-123; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 43.

<sup>281</sup>VD, 38.

<sup>282</sup>Augustine sensitivity to music caused him much torment because his mind was dominated by a spiritualizing theology which ascribed the senses to the Old Testament, the "old man", the old world: he is afraid of "sinning grievously" when he is "moved more by the music than by the reality to which the singing refers"—and would prefer "not to hear singing at all". Fortunately his rigorism is dampened when he recalls the profound stirring his soul experienced when he first heard church music in Milan, and although he does not risk a final decision,



Church which gave him (Augustine) a shattering experience, penetrating the whole man, and which led him forward on the way to the Church. This is the ascent's pedagogical aspect, the stimulating of others to praise God.<sup>283</sup>

### Ascent is a Gift

Benedict XVI and Augustine believed that the ascent is not man's initiative but a gift. It is God who gives faith and nourishes it by deferring hope. God stretches our desire, stretches our mind, makes it more capacious making it ready for the revelation of Wisdom in Person.<sup>284</sup> It is the work of God which ignites man's restless heart to ascend toward God. It is not within the power of man's reason to exercise itself and reach out to God. The ascent to God is not a matter of intellectual training but God's loving gift to man. The hermeneutics of ascent is not possessing the Truth after discovering it. It is rather the Truth that possesses and seeks man. It is God who makes the initiative in revealing Himself in many ways. The sense of awe in contemplating nature invites man to seek and ascend to the source of the beauty of creation.<sup>285</sup> The path of interiority where Augustine bids the return to the 'self' where God awaits Him is another prism of ascent to God. Faith is also a path that ushers one to the knowledge of Christ.<sup>286</sup> Augustine asserted the ability to reflect in silence and look deeply into ourselves and God's closeness to man, and to reinterpret the thirst for the infinite that we bear within us, that impel us to go further and to refer to Christ who can quench it.<sup>287</sup> The Church, in pilgrimage to Christ, is a door that leads us to know Him.<sup>288</sup> In the liturgy the believers are stimulated to ascend and praise God. In other words it is God's descent, in the Incarnation, which makes the vision

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he is "more inclined to value the use of singing in church: by means of the delight of the ears, the soul which is still weak is encouraged to rise to the world of piety." In Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast Of Faith*, 110-111.

<sup>283</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Transforming Power of Faith: General Audiences 17 October 2012- 6 February 2013*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013, 116.

<sup>284</sup>Ibid., 15; Io. Ep. 6.4.

<sup>285</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Transforming Power of Faith*, 17; Sermon 242.2

<sup>286</sup>Eugene TeSelle, "Faith," in *Augustine Through the Ages*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, et al. (Cambridge: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 347-348.

<sup>287</sup>*Da Vera. Rel.* 39.72; Benedict XVI, *The Transforming Power of Faith*, 18.

<sup>288</sup>Benedict XVI, *The Transforming Power of Faith*, 16;

and knowledge of God possible. Man ascends to God by accompanying Christ on his descending path, humility.<sup>289</sup>

### **The Interior Movement from the words to the Word**

Hermeneutics of ascent can mean the search for the Word within the words. It is listening to the voice of God within the words or text. The ascent involves the entrance into the interior movement of the Word, “which in human words conceals and which opens the divine words.”<sup>290</sup> In *De Trinitate*, Augustine elaborates the dynamics of word-becoming. He describes the “types of words leading from spoken words to the interior words of thought, and finally to the Word of God.”<sup>291</sup> Augustine describes the analogy of the Word assuming flesh and the inner word in the mind assuming the concept, thus becoming a sign that conceals and reveals at the same time.

Thus the word which makes a sound outside is the sign of the word which lights up inside, and it is this latter that primarily deserves the name of “word.” For the one that is uttered by the mouth of flesh is really the sound of a “word,” and it is called “word” too because of the one which assumes it in order to be manifested outwardly. Thus in a certain fashion our word becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it is manifested to the senses of men, just as the Word of God became flesh by assuming that in which it too could be manifested to the senses of men. And just as our word becomes sound without being changed into sound, so the Word of God became flesh, but it is unthinkable that it should have been changed into flesh. It is by assuming it, not by being consumed into it, that both our word becomes sound and that Word became flesh.

Therefore if you wish to arrive at some kind of likeness of the Word of God, however unlike it may be in many ways, do not look at that word of ours which sounds in the ears, neither when it is uttered vocally nor when it is thought of silently. But *we must go beyond all these and*

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<sup>289</sup>Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 95.

<sup>290</sup>Hahn. *Covenant and Communion*, 189; Benedict XVI, Meditation during the First General Congregation of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 6, 2008); Hahn. *Covenant and Communion*, 189.

<sup>291</sup>Brian Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, (Kindle Locations 247-251). Kindle Edition.

*come to that word of man through whose likeness of a sort the Word of God may somehow or other be seen in an enigma.*<sup>292</sup>

The movement of the Word in the words reveals the way or path that leads to the ascent to the divine. The search for the Word involves then participation in the dynamics of the Word assuming flesh. It is not isolation of the word or the text outside the Church. Hermeneutic of ascent, that is the quest for the Word (*Res*) within the words (*signa*), requires the Church, the proper locus of searching and listening to the Word within.

The search for the Word within words can be demonstrated in Benedict XVI's assimilation of the relationship between *signum* (sign) and *res* (reality). In the mind of Augustine, the words are signs, which point to something else.<sup>293</sup> The words are visible signs of the invisible Word. The texts do not only point to a historical meaning but it points also to a spiritual meaning or another reality. Grounding on the relationship of *signum* and *res*, Augustine developed a Christological hermeneutic. It was based on the Word becoming flesh. The Eternal Word enters history becoming word of God. Hence, the text as sign points to the reality of God, in figure of Christ. "The words of Scriptures reveal the Word sensibly in the world and act like another Incarnation of Christ, though in more limited sense."<sup>294</sup> In such revelation of the Word, one encounters the living *Logos*. The passage of the ascent begins with the visible sign of the words which conceals and reveals, and bears the fruit of an encounter with the invisible Word. This can be illustrated in the portrait of Jesus in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes (*signum*) portray veiled interior biography of Jesus (*Res*), a kind of portrait of his figure.<sup>295</sup> The words in the Beatitudes signify the reality of Jesus as the Merciful, the Poor, the Meek and Humble, the Peacemaker, and so on. The words reveal Jesus as Merciful analogically to the saints who followed Jesus' acts of mercy but not totally a copycat of a Merciful God. In line with the relationship of sign and reality, the sign which does not point to itself but to the *Res*, implies a humble disposition in the ascent to Christ. The words, as signs, are humble they point not to themselves but to the Word. It follows the dynamic of the descent and ascent of the Son of God. The Son's

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<sup>292</sup>*De Trin.*, XV.11.20; Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue*, Kindle Locations 247-250. The emphasis is mine in Italics.

<sup>293</sup>Straudt, "Reality and Sign," 335.

<sup>294</sup>*Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>295</sup>Casarella, "Searching The Face of the Lord in Ratzinger's Jesus of Nazareth," 86.

humble taking of the human flesh is the way of ascent to the Divinity of Christ. Hence, the humble nature of the words teaches the movement of ascent leading to the Word. Humility is a necessary condition in order to grasp the transcendent meaning of the text. The quest for the real Jesus, by excluding the transcendent referent, is a form of pride and cannot grasp the real Jesus. The nature of the words reveals the dynamic of the hermeneutic of ascent to Christ.

Augustine elaborates relationship of sign and reality in which the sign produced the signified. The bishop of Hippo asserts the body of Christ is a holy sign which partakes of the meaning of the sign. The Church as a holy sign has a role of leading the people to its signification, the body of Christ as a place of love and the Trinitarian love (*Res*). Benedict XVI elaborates that the Augustinian meaning of sacrament is equivalent to the holy sign. The body of Christ, as a Sign, responsibly leads the believer to ascend toward the greater things signified by the Church. The flesh of Christ (*signum or sacramentum*) ushers the quester to go beyond the sign and ascend to the spiritual reality of the divinity of Christ (*Res*). It is when the 'signified' is realized that the Church becomes the sign of God's presence in the world.<sup>296</sup> The members of the body of Christ also become signs of love or the body of Christ, a living sign of God's love.

### **The Exercise of Union**

Hermeneutics of Ascent is a movement of unification in order to see the real Jesus. The ascent takes the pattern of the descent of the Son of God assuming humanity. The scattered children of God were taken into single body, through the unification or purification.<sup>297</sup> The unity and harmony of the community of believers results in the vision of God. This dynamic of purification is seen as exercise of the mind that moves from the material to the spiritual. Augustine baptized the Platonic ascent to Wisdom by adding the Incarnation as the pattern and way leading to the vision of God.

The Old Testament is a sign pointing to Jesus Christ. It is the path to Jesus Christ.<sup>298</sup> Augustine, led by Ambrose, discovered Christ

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<sup>296</sup>Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, Kindle Locations, 591-600.

<sup>297</sup>*Ibid.*, 262; Toom, *Thought Clothed*, 36.

<sup>298</sup>Benedict XVI, General Audience (January 9, 2008); Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 111.

in the words of the Old Testament by transcending the literal sense.<sup>299</sup> “The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old is made manifest in the New.”<sup>300</sup> The Old Testament should be read in the light of Christ. There are images and figurative signs in the Old Testament pointing to the reality of Christ like, Adam, Moses, Jeremiah, and so on. They are ‘types’ of Christ. The words, figures, images and others signify something about Christ. Augustine, using typological figurative interpretation, manifests the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament from the standpoint of the New.<sup>301</sup> Augustine, with the guidance of Ambrose and indirect influence of Origen, learned to ascend from the material or literal understanding of the Old Testament and progress toward the spiritual level.<sup>302</sup> Augustine discovered the spiritual usefulness of the figurative signs in the Old Testament.<sup>303</sup> The figurative signs of Christ in the Old Testament were used to give more light to the understanding of Christ in the New Testament and deepening of one’s knowledge of the real Jesus. Augustine learned about the reuse of texts from Scripture itself. Most significantly, the New Testament continued the tradition of reusing Old Testament texts in a new context as well as interpreting them from a new perspective. The search for the face of Christ within the context of the figurative signs will not just add data to the many lives of Jesus but the images of Jesus create a strong impact on to the reader, society, and the Church. The Christological interpretations from the text direct the subject to a spiritual transformation or moral conversion.

## Conclusion

Augustine’s quest for the real Christ is an essential aspect in his Christological hermeneutics. The name of Christ is the condition, the author and the method of all his thinking. Christ is the source and method for his philosophical and theological thinking. Augustine’s method of knowing Christ was defined in the crucible of his searching and the examination of his culture and of his faith. His understanding

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<sup>299</sup>VD, 38.

<sup>300</sup>Ibid., 41; Quaestiones in Heptateuchum, 2, 73; Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 111.

<sup>301</sup>VD, 41.

<sup>302</sup>Karlfried Froehlich, “Take up and Read: Basics of Augustine’s Biblical Interpretation,” *Interpretation* 58/1 (January 2004), 6.

<sup>303</sup>see. Tarmo Toom, “Augustine on Scripture,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Augustine*. Eds C.C. Pecknold and Tarmo Toom, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013, 89.

of Christ was articulated through integrating and adapting critically the philosophy of his time to the Christian faith. One fruit of his quest for Christ is the restructuring of his method of reading the Bible from material to spiritual understanding. The transition of his reading the Bible, helps him contemplate the visible incarnate Christ and rise to the vision of the Divinity of Christ. Augustine's method of searching for Christ is a spiritual method rather than an analysis of Christ.

Augustine and Benedict XVI believed that the power of reason was limited by pride, sin and moral weakness. For them, the soul needs faith in its search for God other than reason. When reason attempts to seek to ascend to the heights of eternity without the involvement of faith it gets lost. Reason without faith can only make futile claims to the truth followed by repeated disappointments leading to skepticism. When reason loses control in its curiosity, the treatment of the sacred book is just a piece of literature to be scrutinized and dissected without taking into consideration its source. Benedict XVI and Augustine recommend that the integration of faith and reason has greater probability in the healing of the fallen nature of man that culminates in the union with the divine. Faith is a quest or a seeking toward understanding. It is the beginning of the quest for Christ that starts from the material to the spiritual. The focus of faith must be on God's action in salvation history; that is what God has done in the visible. The visible human Christ is the way and real Son of God.

The Augustinian concept of prayer is a form of quest for the real Jesus. Prayer is an exercise of the mind in search for God. The sermon of Augustine based on Lk. 11: 9 *Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find knock, and the door will be opened*, is a form movement of the mind reaching for the revelation of the divine mysteries. The best locus of the prayer exercise is the Church with its liturgy and sacraments. Benedict XVI claims that the privileged place for the prayerful reading of sacred Scripture is the liturgy, and particularly the Eucharist, in which, as we celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament, the word itself is present and at work in our midst. Augustine believed that prayerful reading or listening is transformative. It leads to becoming the body of Christ. Augustine recommended humility as another condition to understand with clarity the message of God addressed to the people. Humility enables one to perceive what is said beyond the epistemological grasp and keep one to press forward and search for the deeper reality signified by the word of God. Humility is a necessary way to gain knowledge of Christ. It is the soil which makes faith and love

grow and encounter the divinity of Christ. The humility of God and the Incarnation cleanse the darkness of the mind caused by sin and unbelief, which, in turn, paves the way to the knowledge of Christ.

Benedict XVI and Augustine combine faith and love in seeking Christ. The appropriation of the Word of God causes the presence of the love and the light of God in the world. Such assimilation of the Word is the evidence of an authentic understanding of the real Jesus. It is Love that motivates faith to seek and understand. Benedict XVI repeats Augustine's assertion of love as the desire for intimate knowledge. Love is the 'lens' for recognizing the Word. The idea of love connected to faith is the moving force that culminates in the vision of God. Love seeking understanding moves one to enter into communion with Jesus' prayer.

Love seeking understanding results in the transformation of the heart into *cor purum*. The hermeneutic of love purifies the heart which enables one to see Christ. *Cor purum* is a result of discipleship, that is, the following of the crucified Christ who reveals the face of love in its purity. Love seeking understanding is a gift. It is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us. The revelation of love in its purity, Jesus Christ, is God's concrete model for humanity. God exegetes man in the revelation of the face of love, Jesus Christ.

The Hermeneutics of love should always be both love of God and love of neighbor, knowing and fulfilling itself as love for the members of the Body of Christ. The growth in charity is an indication of understanding the meaning of the scriptures and Christ, who is love. The increase of twin love in man's heart guarantees a sound interpretation of the Bible and the correct understanding of Jesus Christ.

The Bishop of Hippo developed the ecclesial dimension of hermeneutics, the *Totus-Christus* way of reading. For him, the quest for Christ should be grounded in the Scripture and the Church. He said, that the Church is not just the institutional arbiter of Scripture; it constitutes the collective life of souls who jointly know God. The purpose of the joint spiritual exercises is to actualize the union between believer and Christ within consciousness, and to provoke responsive love. The relationship with the Head, the Son of God and with the members of the Body of Christ is a necessary condition to grow in the understanding of faith. The incorporation and the assimilation of the faith within the Christological locus transport one to the deeper knowledge of the divinity of Christ.

The Church is the place where one can be immersed in the authority of the 'mysteries.' Such immersion recreates the believers and leads them to communion with God. The participation in the worship confirms the faith of the faithful and engenders their faith in Christ. The ecclesial reading and listening to the voice of Christ is a spiritual exercise of the body of Christ. It is an exercise of the Church of understanding herself as the body of Christ by reading the Scriptures. Hence, the entering into the Church is a path of understanding oneself as a member of the body of Christ. It is a place to learn to read like Christ, understand like Christ, see like Christ and become like Christ.

Augustine's quest beyond the material led him to accept the hermeneutics of ascent. Its general feature is the pilgrimage of the mind from the material level to the spiritual level. It is a movement that draws man away from what is opposed to God. The visible body is the point of departure or a sign that paves the way to the upward movement of the quester. The hermeneutical ascent presupposes that spiritual meaning of the text is based on a historical event of the Bible. Thus, Augustine will definitely oppose those who interpret the text within the historical level only. Augustine's hermeneutics of ascent can be a paradigm for developing future Christological reading of the Bible. It can complement the historical critical method especially the philosophical hermeneutics and other modern approaches of reading the Bible.

Hermeneutics of ascent can mean the search for the Word within the words. It is listening to the voice of God within the words or text. The ascent involves the entrance into the interior movement of the Word, which, in human words, conceals and opens the divine words. Augustine elaborates relationship of sign and reality in which the sign produces the signified. Benedict XVI and the Bishop of Hippo assert that the Body of Christ is a holy sign which partakes of the meaning of the sign. The Church as a holy sign has a role of leading the people to its signification, the body of Christ as a place of love and the Trinitarian love. It is when the 'signified' is realized; the Church becomes the sign of God's presence in the world, the City of God.



# The Concept of Work in *Laborem Exercens* of St. John Paul II and Karl Marx<sup>1</sup>

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Carmelo P. Marollano, Ph.D.

## Abstract

*Work has always been a contentious issue. It is an issue which has gripped both civil and ecclesiastical authorities as it relates to other equally contentious issues like human rights of workers and the dynamics of a nation's socio-economic-political thrusts. As man seeks to live a humane and dignifying life s/he seeks for the best work that s/he can have. Some people settle for a kind of work which pays him/her well or something like being able to make a difference in the lives of others through his/her work or simply something like a kind of work where s/he can actualize his/her potentials.*

*In this paper the author wishes to look at work from the lens of a very orthodox thinker, St. John Paul II through his social encyclical *Laborem Exercens* and that of the controversial Karl Marx. At first glance the pairing of the topic may cause eyebrows to raise because of the polarity of their ideas based on their personal identity, beliefs and conviction. There is a reason for this expected reaction. Pope John Paul II, for example, in this encyclical lambasts those who espoused Communism and Socialism for their adherence to class struggle as a way of wrangling out*

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*from the clutches of the capitalists' perceived exploitative system. For his part Marx is quite notorious for his famous statement condemning religion as the opium of the people.*

*Expectedly, the stand of *Laborem Exercens* is at loggerheads with that of Marx. But are there any elements where their respective positions may converge? The author believes there are. The encyclical mentioned about the subjective and the objective dimensions of work. On the subjective aspect, both philosophers believe that work helps man to actualize his human potentialities. Work enables man to become truly human and to realize his essence, so to speak. Another aspect by which the two thinkers agree is on the idea that as man works in order to subdue and dominate the earth s/he uses tools and instrument to come up with a better and more efficient output. Sadly, situations may occur where these tools and instruments dislodge man in his work.*

*The author is convinced that St. John Paul II and Karl Marx, though they may be polar opposites, share the same passion for work and the workers. It is in work that man lives and moves about with his being and by which he carries out the mandate of his Creator.*

This undertaking aims to show the convergences of St. John Paul II as found in the encyclical *Laborem Exercens* and Karl Marx's concept of work. The author hopes to address the following questions: 1) How does St. John Paul II conceive work in *Laborem Exercens*? 2) How does Karl Marx view work? 3) How do their respective ideas converge as far as the notion of work is concerned?

Qualitative-descriptive-analytical research through use of books, journals and other scholarly magazine found in different libraries is deemed fit for this work. In order to better approach the whole topic the author would like to elucidate each of the respective sub-questions one by one in order to finally answer the main concern at the end of this undertaking. It is the hope of the researcher that he would be able to give a different impression as far as Karl Marx is concerned who is widely perceived to be anti-Catholic in his positions. The researcher wishes to portray him that he is not that bad at all. The author aims to arrive at this end by putting him side by side with a well-loved figure of the Catholic Church – St. John Paul II, a philosopher and theologian.

Human beings work. As a creature having a body and a soul, man has spiritual and material components which have their corresponding objects. His spiritual entity moves him to aspire for loftier and nobler concerns like the pursuit of personal perfection and holiness. His material component prods him to engage in mundane and economic pursuits necessary for survival and preservation of his species. In this regard, it is, therefore, in man's intrinsic constitution that he works and should work.

St. John Paul II and Karl Marx are probably the two renowned thinkers who helped shape and influence the modern times, coming from two distinct worlds – from the religious sector and from the socio-political arena, respectively. These two gentlemen are among the philosophers who tackled passionately the problem of work and the rights of workers. The former did it through the clout of his office as the Supreme Pontiff by writing and issuing social encyclicals. Karl Marx did it through the power of his pen and ken as he wrote vigorously on matters appertaining thereto.

The two are popularly perceived to be at odds considering that St. John Paul II was very faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church while Karl Marx who was a philosopher, political theorist and social revolutionary during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was quite unorthodox, factious and inflammatory with his ideas. Who can simply forget and brush aside his famous declaration that 'religion is the opium of the people'? However, they both share the same love and passion in defending the rights of the workers, albeit in their own intellectual perspectives and personal convictions.

It is along this line that the author wishes to posit that there is actually no contradiction between the respective positions of the well-respected St. John Paul II's ideas and that of the popularly perceived 'villain', Karl Marx, and his stand as far as the concept of work is concerned. It is the firm belief of the author that there is no need to reconcile their positions for the simple reason that they are not at odds anyway. We now proceed to elucidate on their respective points of view on the concept of work.

### **St. John Paul II's Concept of Work in *Laborem Exercens***

The social encyclical *Laborem Exercens* starts with the overarching position that 'work is a fundamental dimension of man's

existence on earth'.<sup>2</sup> Work is something that is carved into the very nature of man as a creature that he may develop himself and bring about the best in everyone around him. God himself worked during the creation of the world. Man, therefore, is called upon to continue the work that God has started.

The said encyclical quotes from a passage in the Book of Genesis which goes this way: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen. 1:28). This biblical passage anchors the primary datum we mentioned earlier that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth. The Jerome Biblical Commentary interprets the word 'subdue' to mean 'to master, to bring forcefully under control'.<sup>3</sup> The encyclical states:

Even though these words do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world. Indeed, they show its very deepest essence. Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe.<sup>4</sup>

Quite clearly we can infer from the passage that man is ordained to take care of the earth, to be its steward and bring about its full development. This insight is echoed in the encyclical when it mentions that the expression 'subdue the earth' refers to all the resources that the earth contain and which, through the conscious activity of man, can be discovered and used for his ends.<sup>5</sup> Man can only carry out this task of subduing the earth given to him by the Creator by the toil of his hands and the sweat of his brow, that is, through work.

Pedro Salgado, O.P., in his commentary and critique on the said social encyclical believes that John Paul II lays down two basic principles. First, that work is for the human person and not vice-versa. Second, capital is not an end in itself but is an instrument at the service

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<sup>2</sup>John Paul II, Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II On Human Work on the Nineteenth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, *Laborem Exercens* (Sept. 14, 1981), §4 (Phils.: Paulines Publishing House, 1997), 14.

<sup>3</sup>Richard J. Clifford, S.J. and Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., "Genesis," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Brown, et al. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 2:4, 8.

<sup>4</sup>*Laborem exercens*, §4.

<sup>5</sup>*Laborem exercens*, §4.

of the human person.<sup>6</sup> The general historical background is provided by the encyclical when it mentions that in the modern period, from the beginning of the industrial age, the Christian truth about work had to oppose the various trends of materialistic and economic thought.<sup>7</sup> It was this same reality which plagued the Industrial Age that served as the framework for Marx to take the cudgels for the workers and expend his energy to their defence and cause. Perceiving work in a materialistic and economic way points to the idea where the worker is treated as a material and economic good.

### **St. John Paul II's Concept of Man**

It is along these lines of thinking that the author wishes to bring forth John Paul II's concept of work. We start with his concept of man, which was influenced by the experiences of growing up as an ordinary lad in his war-torn Poland as well as his intellectual make up during his student days which was attributable to Max Scheler's phenomenology and his being a Neo-Thomist. In philosophy circles Karol Wojtyla, together with Edith Stein who is later known as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, were two of the most prominent thinkers who continued the phenomenology of Max Scheler. But long before he became engrossed with it he was a stage actor.

Jaroslav Kupczak, O.P. provides us with a description of the young Karol Wojtyla when he wrote:

One key to understanding Wojtyla, I think, is that first of all he is a poet and a dramatist. His sensibility is that of an artist. He is sensitive, feels things deeply, responds instantly to persons and situations through his emotions, takes things in as wholes, and learns quickly from concrete experience. He trusts experience more than words. He likes to reflect on concrete wholes, as an artist would, in order to allow their inner form to emerge subtly and slowly.<sup>8</sup>

In the foregoing passage we glean Wojtyla's humanness and affection for his fellow human beings. While he is an intellectual exposed

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<sup>6</sup>Pedro Salgado, O.P., *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique* (Quezon City: R. P. Garcia Publishing Co., Inc. 1992), 306.

<sup>7</sup>*Laborem exercens*, §7.

<sup>8</sup>Jaroslav Kupczak, O.P., *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), xii.

to the intricacies of deductive reasoning, he was equally strong on the affective and emotive side. This trait served him well later on when he ran to the defence of the workers and the plight they were going through. Combining his exposure as an actor and as a bishop he wrote in his book *The Acting Person* on the essential composition of man.

This notion of “spirituality” may serve as the key to the understanding of the complexity of man. For we now see man as the person, and we see him first of all in his acting, in the action. He then appears in the field of our integral experience as somebody material, as corporeal, but at the same time we know the personal unity of this material somebody to be determined by the spirit, by his spiritual nature and spiritual life. Indeed, the very fact that the personal – as well as the ontic – unity of the corporeal man is ultimately commanded by man’s spiritual factor allows us to see in him the ontic composite of soul and body, of the spiritual and material elements.<sup>9</sup>

Very clearly we can glean that Wojtyla truly believed that man is a composite of body and soul. He is not only a corporeal creature but there is also a spiritual component in him. As such it would be a great disservice to treat man only in material and economic terms.

### **St. John Paul II’s Concept of Work:**

After having peeped at the intellectual mindset of the young would-be St. John Paul II we can now understand why he manifested great love and fervour for the whole man in *Laborem Exercens*. This is reflected in the passage where the encyclical states:

As a person, man is therefore the subject of work. As a person he works. He performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfil the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity.<sup>10</sup>

Humanity hinges on spirituality. More than just the fact that man is man because of his rationality, he also has a spiritual dimension which elevates him all the more from other creatures. When man works he uses his mind. However, there is something deeper which prods him to work, a nobler and more sublime reason, God gave him a vocation to subdue

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<sup>9</sup>Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1969), 185.

<sup>10</sup>*Laborem exercens*, §6.

and dominate the earth. This calling points to man's unenviable role in the whole economy of salvation. When God commanded man 'to subdue the earth, to dominate it', He vested him with a responsibility to bring creation to greater heights and to its fullness as well as himself and his fellowmen along the line.

The encyclical distinguishes two manners of looking at work: the subjective sense and the objective sense. Let us tackle first the subjective dimension of work. The encyclical tells us:

Understood as a process whereby man and the human race subdue the earth, work corresponds to this basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself and confirms himself *as the one who "dominates"*. This dominion, in a certain sense, refers to the subjective dimension even more than to the objective one: this dimension conditions *the very ethical nature* of work. In fact there is no doubt that human work has an ethical value on its own, which clearly and directly remain linked to the fact that the one who carries out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say a subject that decides about himself.<sup>11</sup>

There are two things which we can pick up from the foregoing citation. First is the confirmation that the one given the task of dominating the earth is considered a person. This insight is probably the heart of the encyclical for the reason that if work is the key to the whole spectrum of the social question then everything boils down to man since he is the worker, he is the one who works! The unfailing truth here is that you cannot separate the work from the worker. On one end of the pole is work, on the other end is the worker. Rightly, we can extend the thesis that man is the key to the social question.

The Church position on this regard is quite consistent. We mentioned earlier the mandate God gave to man in Genesis. Gillett beautifully puts it when he says:

Men and women, in exercising stewardship over the divinely given creation, are to be the "hands" of the Creator in what they do with the earth. Thus according to the Genesis account of creation, work has intrinsic meaning for the person who performs it, and also meaning in relation to the earth (world).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Laborem exercens*, §6.

<sup>12</sup>Richard Gillett, *The Human Enterprise: A Christian Perspective on Work* (Kansas City: Leaven Press, 1985), 86.

To say that men and women are to be the ‘hands’ of the Creator speaks of the enormity of the task. However, they just have to shoulder on because it is through it that they find intrinsic meaning to their existence. It is through work as well that they manifest and confirm themselves as persons. Obviously work is not just any other physical and cumbersome activity of man.

Both the Old and the New Testament testify the affection that the Creator gives to work and the worker. Gillet points to the book of Leviticus where the passage ‘the earth is the Lord’s’ rings very loud. Also the prophet Isaiah (5:8) and Micah (2:1-2) gave a resounding warning to those who would lay claim on properties and belongings which are not theirs.<sup>13</sup>

The New Testament is also peppered with passages which clearly manifest God’s fondness for work. Gillet eloquently enunciates:

In the New Testament, the parables of Jesus abound with illustrations drawn from the world of work: toilers in the vineyard, the tax collectors, the fishermen, the household. Jesus is depicted as a carpenter, Paul as a tentmaker. The ordinary lives of working people thus become infused with dignity. Of course, many were the words of Jesus against those who accumulated wealth without thought of their brothers and sisters, or of the kingdom of God... The Epistle of James, a tract full of warnings to the wealthy and the concern for the poor, specifically denounces as a grave wrong depriving the worker of a just wage (Jas 4:4).<sup>14</sup>

The very fact that Jesus himself worked is an undeniable affirmation that work is valued highly. We all know that even God himself worked during the Creation. The people around Jesus, his disciples, his father, Joseph, were all workers! Here work takes on a deeper meaning since it is intrinsically rooted in our vocation as human beings. It is in this regard that the encyclical points to the primordial idea that “man is destined for work and called to it... work is ‘for man’, and not man ‘for work’”.<sup>15</sup>

Gillet continued his exposition of the Church’s position and mindset on work. He cites two pillars of the early Church and how they

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<sup>13</sup> Gillet, *The Human Enterprise*, 87

<sup>14</sup> Gillet, *The Human Enterprise*, 87-88.

<sup>15</sup> *Laborem exercens*. §6.



perceived work. First is St. Augustine who, according to Gillet, in his treatise *De Genesi ad Litteram* affirmed

The connection between what human beings accomplish by their labor and the betterment of the God-given created order: "Those things which God had created profited by the help of human work"<sup>16</sup>

Here we read clearly that God's creation, the world, is made better, not in the sense that God's handiwork is of poor quality, but in the sense of bringing it to new heights, bringing out new 'creations', so to speak by the toil of human hands. St. John Chrysostom, like Augustine, stressed God's creation and the nobility of man's work but went a step further in claiming that the work of the crafts (the smith, the currier, the carpenter, etc.) must issue in something useful, something helpful, and not to be merely good craftsmanship in and of itself, avers Gillet.<sup>17</sup> Work, for John Chrysostom, starts with man and goes beyond man. The encyclical mentions that work is a 'transitive' activity, meaning, it begins with man and is directed towards an object which is outside of him.<sup>18</sup> As early as the Patristic Period we get to peep into the objective sense of work.

The second dimension that we wish to expound is what *Laborem Exercens* refers to as the objective sense of work which is manifested in the progress that one can see in the culture and civilization of humanity. The encyclical is very clear on this when it mentions that man subdues the earth much more when he begins to cultivate it and then to transform its products, adapting them to his own use. When man works he uses tools and other apparatus to make his output better, the process faster and just about everything that he produces more efficient.

A brief glance at history tells us that civilizations have undergone many epochs where man originally started with his bare human hands, then came his crude instruments then bettering it as years and centuries passed by. Then came the Industrial Revolution where machines were invented. It was an era of upheaval and great strides of human progress. This period truly revolutionized man's way of life and the face of the earth. Man's genius did not end there. Then came the computer age, the era of microprocessors, where all man needs to do is press the button and lo, and behold, the finished product! If man is the extension of the

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<sup>16</sup>Gillet, *The Human Enterprise*, 88.

<sup>17</sup>Gillet, *The Human Enterprise*, 88.

<sup>18</sup>*Laborem exercens*, § 4.

creative hands of God, then technology is the extension of man's hands. *Laborem Exercens* acknowledges the help and benefits that technology offers. In fact it is where precisely the objective sense of work comes into play. The encyclical is very clear on this regard when it affirms:

technology is undoubtedly man's ally. It facilitates his work, perfects, accelerates and augments it. It leads to an increase in the quantity of things produced by work, and in many cases improves their quality.<sup>19</sup>

Man's needs, aspirations and even survival, for that matter, have become more complex and diverse. From the onset of the Industrial Revolution up to the present time the progress of technology has taken a quantum leap, never imaginable before. Mechanical robots are a thing of the past. We now have thinking robots who are given the aptitude to come up with decisions regarding moral situations or dilemmas in the workplace, in particular, and in society, in general.<sup>20</sup>

Much is said on the positive contributions of the Industrial Revolution to the cause of human progress. The lot of human civilization improved by leaps and bounds. The world suddenly became a producing and a productive world. But is that all there was to it? Was everything rosy and laudable? Certainly, not according to Charles Dickens in his book entitled *Hard Times* where he narrated the plight of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England people with their experience of exploitation, injustice, subjugation and misery. Gillet laments the fact that the succeeding generations tend to look on the positive contributions of the Industrial Revolution while avoiding not to notice the negative effects it had and the damage it caused upon human beings, families and communities.<sup>21</sup>

Cognizant of the downside and ill-effects of technology, the encyclical rightly points out:

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<sup>19</sup>*Laborem exercens*, §5.

<sup>20</sup>Dr. Alma Santiago-Espartinez presented a paper entitled "*And the Machine Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us: Refiguring the New Human in Karol Wojtyla's Christian Personalism*" in the John Paul II Centennial International Conference held in University of San Jose-Recoletos in Cebu City last January 16-18, 2020. She mentioned that there is a brand new field of endeavor called transhumanism and the discussion thereof is of paramount importance in contemporary intellectual discourse since it offers an enticing tessellation of possibility of altering the natural and human sphere.

<sup>21</sup>Gillet, *The Human Enterprise*, 9.

... it is also a fact that, in some instances, technology can cease to be man's ally and become almost his enemy, as when the mechanization of work "supplants" him, taking away all personal satisfaction and the incentive to creativity and responsibility, when it deprives many workers of their previous employment, or when, through exalting the machine, it reduces man to the status of a slave.<sup>22</sup>

John Paul II, an intellectual pope<sup>23</sup> that he is, saw both the upside and downside of technology, the unparalleled opportunities for progress, on the one hand, and the devious concomitant effects that lurk behind it, on the other hand. This reality could never be stated much clearer than what the encyclical acknowledges:

Man's life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity, but at the same time work contains the unceasing measure of human toil and suffering, and also of the harm and injustice which penetrate deeply into social life within individual nations and on the international level. While it is true that man eats the bread produced by the work of his hands . . . it is also a perennial truth that he eats this bread by the sweat of his face, that is to say, not only by personal effort and toil but also in the midst of many tensions, conflicts and crises, which, in relationship with the reality of work, disturb the life of individual societies and also of all humanity.<sup>24</sup>

As it can be seen, the two senses of work, the subjective and objective senses are deeply intertwined. Work is a like a coin which has two faces, one inseparable from the other. This manner by which the encyclical views work is reminiscent of the classical axiom '*agere sequitur esse*, (action follows essence). So 'I act because I am'. In this regard then work is not simply any manual

or intellectual activity. It is the avenue whereby the person expresses himself, and more importantly, actualizes himself. John Paul II is very clear on this when he wrote in his book *The Acting Person* (*Ozoba i czyn*):

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<sup>22</sup> *Laborem exercens*, §5.

<sup>23</sup> Jove Jim Aguas, Ph.D. believes that St. John Paul II is an intellectual pope, a world class philosopher and ethicist. In his philosophical magnum opus, *The Acting Person*, he displays his familiarity with phenomenology and Thomism. He is one of the major philosophers, a pillar at that, of our time.

<sup>24</sup> *Laborem exercens*, §1.

... actions constitute the specific moment whereby the person is revealed. Action gives us the best insight into the inherent essence of the person and allows us to understand the person most fully. We experience man as a person, and we are convinced of it because he performs actions.<sup>25</sup>

If action allows us to see the person in his essence and if work is a form of action, therefore, it follows logically that work actualizes the person, it makes him human. By that same token, any form of work which dehumanizes the worker is also a form of dehumanization of man. In this regard the encyclical laments with the reality rampant in today's world economy – the mercantilization of labor. Here work is seen as a commodity with a corresponding price, albeit incommensurate to its real value. Equally appalling is the treatment of the worker as a mere cog in the marketplace, replaceable, expendable and negligible. Due to this economic approach, there is widespread poverty, hunger and even starvation in some parts of the world all because of the fact that man, the worker, is treated as a mere tool and instrument. The encyclical laments these realities thereby coming up with the notion that labor ought to be prioritized over capital. In the parlance of Immanuel Kant, man should not be used as a means to an end but as an end in itself. This idea is very explicit in his book *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* where he formulated the formula of the second imperative referred to as the Formula of Humanity as an End in Itself which states: “*So act that you use humanity, as much as in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means.*”<sup>26</sup>

Many capitalists these days are using the worker to further their wealth and power, not minding the exhortation of *Laborem Exercens*’ priority of labor over capital. Connecting the dots, from the objective sense, anything appertaining to work which results to suffering, harm and injustice, are deplorable, not simply from an economic point of view, but in the fact that they hinder the full development and actualization of man. In the language of Karl Marx dehumanization is called alienation. Work actualizes man and let no one put anything asunder.

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<sup>25</sup>Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 11.

<sup>26</sup>Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Moral*, Trans, Allen Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 51.

## Karl Marx And His Concept of Work

### Karl Marx's Concept of Man

Man is the microcosm of the universe. Should we want to understand society in which man lives we ought to go back to how society perceives man. In this instance, how does Karl Marx regard man? Allen Wood in his analysis believes that for Marx a human being is a *Gattungswesen* which means 'species being' or 'species essence'.<sup>27</sup> Wood continues:

*Gattungswesen* is a term which can be naturally applied both to the individual human being and to the common nature or essence which resides in every individual man or woman . . . it can be applied to the entire human race, referring to humanity as a single collective entity or else to the essential property which characterizes this entity and makes it a single distinctive thing in its own right.<sup>28</sup>

What Marx is saying is that man's essence is not peculiar to him but is also found, better yet, true, to other species viewed as a single collective being. There is, therefore, an essential connection between and amongst human beings for the reason that they are all 'herd animals' or 'social animals' who live and survive with others in the society where they live in.<sup>29</sup>

This idea is reflective of what Marx wrote in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach where he posits that 'the human essence is no abstraction inhering in the single individual and in its actuality it is the ensemble of social relationships'.<sup>30</sup> Two insights can be gathered from these mother statements. First, there is an umbilical cord which runs through all human beings by virtue of their common essence. This means that one human being is inextricably linked to another human being, in a word, interconnectedness. This essence finds expression in social relationships. Man is aware that he lives and survives with others in a society. Secondly, and probably the most important, is the notion that man, as a species-being, it engenders a free, conscious life activity.

Marx distinguishes man from animals. On one hand, animals for him are unconsciously caught up with their own life activity. This

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<sup>27</sup>Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2004),17.

<sup>28</sup>Wood, *Karl Marx*, 17.

<sup>29</sup>Wood, *Karl Marx*, 18.

<sup>30</sup>Bastiaan Wielenga, *Introduction to Marxism* (India: Center for Social Action, 2003), 317.

means that these lower forms of creatures do not distinguish themselves from their own activity. On the other hand, human beings make their life activity an object of their will and consciousness. Man as he lives his life is conscious that he is doing this or that kind of activity. Marx maintains that the character of the human species, of man as a species-being, consists in a conscious life activity.<sup>31</sup> The ability to do something from one's will and the consciousness that you are doing such speaks volumes in terms of human autonomy. Man is an autonomous being who decides for himself. It means freedom!

Having laid down the key terms such as interconnectedness, sociality, consciousness, autonomy and freedom appertaining to Marx's notion of man, we are now in a better position to walk through his concept of work or labor, alienation and what prompted him to abhor capitalism. What was his ideal of man? What was his central message and objective as he went about in his life formulating and conceptualizing his position?

### **Karl Marx's Concept of Work**

David Conway provides us with the clue to the elemental drive of Marx in his lifetime.

What Marx believed was that human beings by nature possess a set of potentialities that are unique to members of the human species. Different forms of society facilitate the actualization of these potentialities in varying degrees. Those human potentialities whose fullest actualization Marx thought most desirable were those that he considered unique to human beings. This set of potentialities constituted what Marx called the human essence. The more fully these potentialities were actualized in human beings the more fully human did those individuals become. To the extent that the social and economic arrangements of a society prevented these distinctively human potentialities of its members from becoming actualized, the more dehumanized would those members be.<sup>32</sup>

If we connect the foregoing statement from that of the previous page two distinctly human potentialities stand out – autonomy and sociality. Marx pounded on these life-long objectives. The most evident observation as we go through the discussion on this regard is the

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<sup>31</sup>Eugene Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd. 1983), 139.

<sup>32</sup>David Conway, *A Farewell to Marx* (England: Penguin Books, 1987), 30.

impression that Marx was very much an Aristotelian. Those who know are familiar with Aristotle's concept on potency-act or potentiality-actuality. Both gentlemen see that 'a fulfilling human life consists in the development and exercise of our essentially human capacities in a life suited to our nature.'<sup>33</sup>

Now what does it mean to say that man has a potentiality towards autonomy? How is it linked to man's life activity, and finally, to labor? Marx was crystal clear in his answer to these questions when he writes in the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*:

Labor, *life activity* and *productive life*, indeed, first appear to man only as a *means* to satisfy a need, the need of maintaining physical existence. Productive life, however, is species-life. It is life-begetting life. The whole character of a species – its species-character – is contained in the character of its life activity; and free conscious activity is the species-character of man.<sup>34</sup>

Placing the two foregoing direct citations side by side yields the impression that man's potentiality for autonomy is best exemplified in his labor and productive life. At the base of this are material needs. Man, due to his hylomorphic nature, has bodily and spiritual needs. The latter kind of need is not exclusive to the religious dimension. It may also refer to social, emotional and psychological needs all pointing to the meta-corporeal component of man. We can also include therein, among others, the feeling of self-fulfilment, belongingness, personal dignity and other human values and aspirations necessary to enable the individual to live a humane life.

Man's bodily needs, though closely intertwined with the spiritual needs, are areas which could be problematic. All human beings need to work and produce in order to live and survive physically and more importantly, in a dignified manner. He needs to 'toil the ground', 'soil his hands' and 'eat by the sweat of his brow', so to speak, in order to further his existence. In his desire to lighten the burden of manual labor and to expedite as well the whole process of production, man produces tools and instruments. In this instance man is a *homo faber*, (man the producer) a producer of tools and instruments belonging to his biological and organic existence like food and clothing. Man does all these with his fellow human beings, in communal life and social exchange, that is,

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<sup>33</sup>Wood, *Karl Marx*, 23.

<sup>34</sup> Eugene Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*, 139.

within the context of the society. Loyd Easton and Kurt Guddat, in their readings of Marx, share with us some insights as to the dynamics of human production and its social aspect.

The exchange of human activity within production itself as well as the exchange of human products with one another is equivalent to the generic activity and the generic spirit, whose actual, conscious, and authentic existence is social activity and social satisfaction. As human nature is the true common life [*Gemeinwesen*] of man, men through the activation of their nature create and produce a human common life, a social essence which is no abstractly universal power opposed to the single individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth.<sup>35</sup>

Human production takes on two corollaries: first is the social and communal aspect of labor and secondly, is the corresponding communal life that it begets among the members of the society. Human labor then is not a life activity which can be taken in isolation. It involves the working individual himself who wants to produce something in order to satisfy his bodily needs and fulfil his spiritual aspirations as well in order to further his existence. Along the process he hopes to achieve and actualize his potentials. Work also takes on a social dimension by working with others in the society.

It is on this note that Marx was insinuating on some societies which tinker and distort the noble aims of human labor and production. He deplored the capitalist societies, and capitalism for that matter, for fostering egoism and selfishness as well as for manipulating and exploiting labor and the laborers. Marx perceives the capitalist economy to be unacceptable and intolerable for the reason that it commercializes human labor by putting a price tag on it. When capitalists do that they take on the human being as a commodity from whom they can earn profit and more capital. From both Christian and Marxist perspective this is evil, this is a form of dehumanization. In Marxist lingo this is alienation. Conway allowed us to peep into the mind of Marx when he wrote:

In Marx's view, capitalism was an extremely dehumanized and dehumanizing form of society. This was because its central constitutive economic institutions militated against the actualization of the distinctively human potentialities of each individual members. These potentialities are only able

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<sup>35</sup>Loyd Easton and Kurt Guddat, *Karl Marx: Writings of Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1997), 271-272.



to achieve their maximum degree of actualization within the framework of a communist society. Communism, for Marx, enables its individual members to be fully human. We thus find Marx writing that 'Communism is . . . the true appropriation of the human essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a . . . human being'.<sup>36</sup>

It is clearly evident in the preceding quote that it is the spiritual aspect – humanization, or the lack of it, that Marx was lamenting as far as capitalism is concerned, on the one hand and his condescending opinions on communism, on the other hand. He strongly believes that it is in communism that man can actualize his human potentials, his human essence so that he can become fully human. He swears that there is no place for dehumanization or alienation in communism as seen in the commodification of labor and thus must be transcended (*Aufhebung*).

Alienation is a topic treated by Marx quite extensively. He was so passionate on this regard that it showed in the amount of intellectual energy he devoted to this topic and which is well entrenched in his writings. He writes:

The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes a cheaper commodity the more commodity he produces. The increase in value of the world of things is directly proportional to the decrease in value of the human world. Labor not only produces commodities. It also produces itself and the worker as a commodity, and indeed in the same proportion as it produces commodities in general.

This fact simply indicates that the object which labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as an alien thing, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor embodied and made objective in a thing. It is the objectification of labor. The realization of labor is its objectification. In the viewpoint of political economy this realization of labor appears as the diminution of the worker, the objectification as the loss of and subservience to the object, and the appropriation as alienation [Entfremdung], as externalization [Entäusserung].<sup>37</sup>

The first paragraph bears out the idea that both labor and the laborer become commodified in the same manner that ordinary products are commodified. What would now happen to the worker's identity in

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<sup>36</sup>Conway, *A Farewell to Marx*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*,

terms of being the principal agent of production when as a commodity he thus deviates from his *terminus ad quem* (aim or goal) which is self-actualization? What would now happen as well to labor itself which has become another commodity in the political economy when it is supposed to be the vehicle whereby man can harness his human potential? It is ironic because labor at this point has now become an instrument for the devaluation of man, for his alienation. Fr. Virgilio Ojoy, O.P. in his book *Marxism and Religion: A Fusion of Horizons* mentions three forms of alienation.<sup>38</sup> First, man is alienated from the product of his work. This happens because his produce becomes a form of capital which he might not be able to possess. A factory worker in a Nike company might not be able to buy for himself or for his kids the shoes that he has made. A farmer might not be able to buy the first class rice that he has produced. The object of human labor, his product is his output. It is something that is external to him, an objective thing. It has autonomous value and power independent from the one who produces it. As it stands apart from the worker, it is in fact an alien thing to him since it now has a commodified value. At this point man becomes alienated. Sadly, he could not identify himself with the product of his labor.

The second form of alienation is when the worker is alienated from the act of producing. Since the laborer may not be able to buy the product of his labor he would subsequently not be able to identify himself with the producing activity itself. This happens because he begins to doubt himself to whom he is producing considering that he cannot even enjoy the product of his sweat and blood. The third form of alienation happens when man begins to feel estranged from his fellow workers. As a species-being man shares in the essential nature of man which is sociality. Therefore, when man works, he not only works for himself but for and with others. Fr. Ojoy pointedly notes that for Marx whatever activity and enjoyment man does, be it either in their content and the mode of existence, are inherently social, that is, social activity and social enjoyment.<sup>39</sup> A deeper implication of this reality, claims Fr. Ojoy, is the understanding where

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<sup>38</sup>Fr. Virgilio Abad Ojoy, O.P., *Marxism and Religion: A Fusion of Horizons* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2001), 112.

<sup>39</sup> Ojoy, *Marxism*, 113.

Man's spiritual property is likewise jeopardized in that both his consciousness is not used to creative labor and that his freedom is taken away from his act of producing due to the fact that his productive activity is reduced to the means for his physical existence, that is, has become a forced labor.<sup>40</sup>

Economically and spiritually man is alienated. The three forms of alienation totally obliterates the *terminus a quo* (starting point) of his existence. Everything appertaining to man, his *raison d etre* (reason for being) could now go into shambles. Marx continues to decry the evils of the capitalist political economy when he bemoans the condition where

... labor produces marvels for the wealthy but it produces deprivation for the worker . It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It produces beauty but mutilation for the worker. It displaces labor through machines, but it throws some workers back into barbarous labor and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but for the worker it produces imbecility and cretinism.<sup>41</sup>

Anyone in his right frame of mind, either a Christian or a Marxist would readily abhor this dehumanizing situation. This is the ideal of Karl Marx. This is the ideal of everybody. Fr. Ojoy puts this ideal in a better light when he concludes:

If each man would be faithful to his species-being, that is, if he would perform his conscious and free productive or life activity not only for himself but also for the other members of the species, he could eventually create a society in which there is a harmonious interaction between man and nature, between man and man. Authentic human values will be projected into nature which will then be shared by all men. In such a society, the humanized nature will always be left for the benefit of all human beings.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

We have now come towards the end of this undertaking. There is much to discuss on *Laborem Exercens* on the concept of work like the rights of workers, spirituality of work, among others, which definitely will give us valuable insights, too. Karl Marx also has a lot more to

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<sup>40</sup>Ojoy, *Marxism*, 113-114.

<sup>41</sup>Kamenka, *The Portable Karl Marx*,

<sup>42</sup>Ojoy, *Marxism*, 113.

say as he wrote extensively on the concept of alienation. However, we simply cannot tackle everything here. The researcher believes that their respective ideas and position about work have been sufficiently put side by side as far as the subjective and objective senses are concerned. Hence we now round up what we have discussed so far.

The author in his elucidation follows the tack utilized by the encyclical where it delineated work in its subjective and objective sense. This would also be our manner of putting the two concepts side by side in order to see where they would converge.

First is work in the subjective sense. The encyclical teaches that man was given the task of subduing the earth by the Creator. Because of this mandate he now becomes the vice-regent of creation. God decided this to be so because of all the creatures He saw man to be the only one

capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency towards self-realization. . . as a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process, independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfil the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity.<sup>43</sup>

Without a doubt work is something that is not extraneous and imposed on man from the outside. It is embedded in his being since the time of creation, thus he is duty-bound to actualize this vocation as it is the very core of his dignity and nature as a human creature. Because of this distinct identity the encyclical declares that work is ‘for man’, and not man ‘for work’.<sup>44</sup>

Man ought not to be subservient to work or even worse, be made as an instrument for work. On the contrary, work ought to become his instrument whereby he can realize, actualize and affirm his very nature. The encyclical is quite categorical on this note when it professes that ‘work is a good thing for man . . . something that corresponds to man’s dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it . . . he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes “more of a human being”’.<sup>45</sup>

Marx involves inferential reasoning in his description of man in relation to work, that is, from a subjective sense. He believes that

<sup>43</sup>*Laborem exercens*. §6.

<sup>44</sup>*Laborem exercens*. §6.

<sup>45</sup> *Laborem exercens*. §9.

the essence of man lies in the fact that he is a species being. As such he shares this essence and identity with others and this forms part of his sociality. As a species being also man engages in conscious life activities which are supposed to be free and autonomous, like work. In a word, Marx asserts that man can only actualize his essence as a species being when he is allowed to act and work in a free and autonomous manner.

We can also explain Marx concept of man in relation to work in the aspect of human potentialities, where he avers that human potentialities are best manifested in and through work and production in a free and autonomous manner. This program towards actualizing human potentialities ought not to be stifled by anyone and anything in the society.

In this regard we can adduce that both *Laborem Exercens* and Karl Marx see work as a way of actualizing and realizing our human vocation and identity. For the encyclical work is whereby man carries on the Creator's mandate to subdue and dominate the earth. By so doing man achieves fulfilment as a human being. For Marx labor and production are the avenues where man can actualize his human potentialities with other fellow species-beings within the confines of freedom and autonomy. As such let no one put anything asunder.

As to the objective sense of work, both the encyclical and Karl Marx agree that man can never be a means to an end but as an end itself. Corollary to this idea is the principle on labor over capital. This particular aspect of work has far-reaching repercussions considering the magnitude of problems today, most specifically the commodification of work and the worker, faced by the industrial society that we have. The following citation captures it perfectly.

In industrial society, labour was considered above all as a source of material wealth, indeed as the only source of this wealth. People worked in order to accumulate wealth and to make progress in an ever more ruthless competition. It has been noted in several quarters how much this culture of economic success has diminished the meaning that labourers give to their work and, because of this, diminished the very meaning of human existence. Work, and therefore man, has become a merchandise.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>H.E. The Most Reverend Anton Stres, C.M., "*Laborem exercens* and Human Work," in *Work as Key to the Social Question: The Great Social and*

The tie that binds the subjective and the objective senses of work is quite pronounced in the foregoing passage. When man is taken in as a merchandise, a mere cog, in the capitalist political economy, which tears apart the teaching of the encyclical on the objective sense of work, man's journey towards the full realization of his humanity, which is the subjective sense, is obliterated. Along this line of elucidation St. John Paul II and Karl Marx would readily agree. This observation finds an ally in Jean Bethke Elshtain who she enthuses that on the principle of labor over capital John Paul II resembles Karl Marx.<sup>47</sup>

While Marxism is inimical to a lot of positions of the Christian religion, and while Christianity also condemns the teachings of Marxism from different angles the two polar opposites connive in terms of allowing man to realize and actualize his full human potentials through work.

To end then, let us hear out what The Most Reverend Anton Stres, C.M. delivered in a plenary at a conference held in Rome and the Vatican City on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* from September 12-15, 2001.

One of the innovations of John Paul II's Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, an innovation which cannot go unnoticed, is the fact that the Pope not only considers the question of work as the source of every other social question but that he places work itself within the context of modern anthropology, an anthropology which is clearly personalist. He thus casts questions of social relationships and social justice in an anthropological and personalist light, a light that is at the same time philosophical and theological. In this way, he avoids and actually moves beyond materialistic economic ideologies that tend to consider work only as a social force, an anonymous force, that produces income and merchandise, rather than seeing it above all as a self-expression of the person and the "realization of his humanity."<sup>48</sup>

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*Economic Transformations and the Subjective Dimension of Work* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002). 28.

<sup>47</sup>Jean Bethke Elshtain. "Catholic Social Teaching and the Meaning of Work," in *Work as Key to the Social Question: The Great Social and Economic Transformations and the Subjective Dimension of Work* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002).34.

<sup>48</sup>H.E. The Most Reverend Anton Stres, C.M., "*Laborem exercens* and Human Work," 12.

# Augustine on Interreligious Dialogue\*

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Fr. Czar Emmanuel V. Alvarez, OSA

## Abstract

*This article explores three possible Augustinian grounds for interreligious dialogue based on the teachings and examples of Augustine of Hippo (354-430) – namely, ecclesiological, eudemonistic, and anthropological. The Bishop of Hippo offers us an interesting vision of the church and its origin. He traces its origin right to the very beginning of man's creation when Adam and Eve entered into a relationship with the Creator. God would have visited humanity three times along the course of history – “before the law” (pre-Mosaic Law), “during the law”, and “time of grace”. The church as we know it is but a manifestation of man's primordial relationship with God. This vision leaves space for other religions to enter into a dialogue beyond institutional churches.*

*As to the eudemonistic ground, Augustine affirms the universality of the desire for happiness. All men want to be happy, and religions are but means that should help man realize this. Any religion that does not help man attain happiness in one way or another is useless. The desire for happiness goes well beyond religions – thus, it constitutes another ground for interreligious dialogue.*

*Lastly, concerning the anthropological ground, Augustine reminds us that beyond all religions we have man, who deserves to be loved and respected. Now, while upholding the dignity of*

*man and his fundamental rights, Augustine also reminds us of his limitations and, therefore, of the need to cultivate humility. Even one's way of understanding God and religious truths is limited. Proponents of various religions must keep this in mind.*

## Introduction

Augustine's stand on interreligious dialogue is one of the least explored areas in Augustinian studies. The last significant studies related to this topic date back to some nineteen years ago (2001)<sup>1</sup> and since then no one has apparently written on it again. It is but both timely and opportune that we treat the subject matter once again not only on the occasion of the current "Year of Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue" (as declared by the CBCP), but also to push the frontiers of our knowledge of the thought of one of the most influential theologians of all time.

All religions aim at putting man in a certain relationship with God or some Supreme Being. Religion is something that is supposed "to tie" God and man together. This is precisely the etymological meaning of the term "religion" (from the Latin word *religio*, derived from the verb *rēligo*, *religare*, "to tie").<sup>2</sup> Throughout the history of humanity we have seen how individual men and peoples from different cultures and places have tried to establish such a relationship and instituted religions of various sorts. In different ways, men have sought some Supreme Being.<sup>3</sup> Ancient paganism had its own religions; sometimes political leaders

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. R. DODARO, "The Secret Justice of God and the Gift of Humility", *Augustinian Studies* 34:1 (2003), pp. 83-96 (reproducing a paper presented two years earlier, in June 2001). Also see A. SOLIGNAC, "Le salut des païens d'après la prédication d'Augustin", *Augustin Prédicateur (395-411). Actes du Colloque International de Chantilly (5-7 septembre 1996)* edited by G. Madec, Paris, Études Augustiniennes (1998), pp. 419-425; and R. DODARO, "Agostino d'Ipbona. *Sermo Dolbeau* 26 e la questione della *salus extra ecclesiam*", *Lateranum* 68:2-3 (2002), pp. 259-266.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. D. P. SIMPSON, *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, New York, Wiley Publishing Inc. 1968, p. 511.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. CCC 843, 847 and 2566; LG 16.



would favor and sanction some religions or go against them, condemning and persecuting them outright.<sup>4</sup>

During the time of Augustine, the Christian religion was just emerging from centuries of violent persecutions. It was already officially recognized by the Roman emperors (from Constantine onwards) as one of the legal religions in the Empire and was even favored by some of them. Alongside the Christian religion, however, there were other religions with their own adherents in various parts of the Empire.<sup>5</sup> Thus we have the Jewish religion, Greek mystery religions<sup>6</sup>, Eastern

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<sup>4</sup>In the Roman Empire, the plight of Christians depended on the mood of the Emperor. Some Emperors were sympathetic to the Christian religion and even supported and favored it (like Constantine and Theodosius), while some Emperors unleashed violent persecutions against Christians (like Septimus Severus and Diocletian). cf. J. COMBY, *How to Read Church History*, Vol. 1, London, SCM Press 1985, pp. 38-46.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. A. BLONDE, *A Brief History of the Private Lives of the Roman Emperors* (sp. Chapter 3 on religion in ancient Rome), London, Constable & Robinson Ltd. 1994, pp. 178-185. Here the author points out that “no single, revealed religion dominated Ancient Rome” (p. 178). Instead, there were a variety of both major and lesser deities invoked upon for diverse reasons (such as for safety, victory in war, power, good harvest, health, etc.). There were divinities for the rich, the peasants, the rank and file of the army, and so forth. All in all “there were no wars of religion in the ancient world” (p. 182). J. Carcopino, however, explains the dying state of many of these religions during the advent of Christianity in the Empire. The Roman pantheon still persisted; the ceremonies continued to be carried out; “but the spirits of men had fled from the old religions” (p. 121). “Roman religion froze the impulses of faith by its coldness and its prosaic utilitarianism ... [It] had wholly lost its power over the human heart” (p. 122). The oriental religions and the Hellenistic philosophies, on the other hand, imbued people with a new fervor and a sense of spiritual renewal, thus paving the way for the coming of the Christian faith. See J. CARCOPINO, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press 2003.

<sup>6</sup>These religions have one thing in common: they have a secret rite (“mystery”) by which selected individuals were brought into a special relationship with a deity and assured of certain benefits. The uninitiated, in this case, could not participate in the cult. Examples of mystery religions would be the local mystery of Panamara in Southwest Asia Minor, the *komyria* and the *heraia* (cults that worshipped Zeus and Hera, respectively), the Eleusinian mysteries, the Dionysiac mysteries, etc.

religions,<sup>7</sup> civic religions,<sup>8</sup> domestic-rural religions, personal religions, and so forth.<sup>9</sup> Augustine himself was once a pagan<sup>10</sup> (unbaptized into the Christian church) and only later converted to the Catholic Church. He was certainly familiar with the other religions of his time both in his native Africa and outside the continent.<sup>11</sup> Now, if he were still alive

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<sup>7</sup>Like those of Isis, Osiris and Sarapis (or Serapis) in Egypt, Astarte and Adonis in Phoenicia, Atargatis in Syria, Cybele and Attis in Phrygia, Mithras in Persia, and so forth.

<sup>8</sup>Each city had its patron deity who protected it. Civic religions were official and part of the civil order. Thus, temples were built with the public funds, taxes were levied for the support of certain cults, etc. Cults were also regulated by the magistrates and the *collegia*.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. E. FERGUSON, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Grand Rapids (Michigan), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1993, pp. 137-298. Also see R. PENNA, *L'ambiente storico-culturale delle origini cristiane*, Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna 2000, pp. 149-174 on traditional religions in the Roman Empire during the early centuries of the current era, the passage to mystery religions, and the cult of the Emperor.

<sup>10</sup>For a brief account on the semantic development of this term, see J. J. O'DONNELL, *Augustine. A New Biography*, New York, HarperCollins Publishers 2005, pp. 182ff.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. *De civ. Dei* 2.4 and 2.26 where Augustine speaks of his familiarity with the pagan feast in Carthage in honor of the goddess Caelestis; *In Joh. ev. tr.* 7.6 where he speaks of a priest of the pagan god Attis. In June of the year 408 a riot broke out in the city of Calama when the Christian clergy tried to stop a pagan festival. The participants retaliated by stoning the church and trying to set it on fire. Augustine's reaction to this incident is recorded in his *Ep.* 91 addressed to Nectarius.

Augustine also tried to reform the Catholic Church in Africa during his days. Some vestiges of pagan practices could still be observed on the part of newly converted Catholics at that time. Take, for example, how the pagan practice of *refrigeria* was subtly incorporated into the Christian cult of the martyrs. The Bishop of Hippo strongly condemned such practice and tried hard to banish it altogether from Africa. Cf. *Ep.* 22 and 29. Also see K. CHABI, "Saint Augustine as a Reforming Voice for the Catholic Church in Roman Africa: The Testimony of his Letter 29 to Alypius" in *Augustinianum*, Year 58, Fasc. 2 (December 2018), pp. 475ff.

For the existence of pagan religions and practices in Numidia in the third and fourth centuries, see J. J. O'MEARA, *Young Augustine. The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to his Conversion*, London, Longmans, Green and Co. 1965, pp. 21ff. However, this author points out that "in the fourth century A.D. Christianity in Africa, as elsewhere, was gaining and paganism as an organized religious system was losing perceptibly": *ibid.*, p. 29.

today, as a Catholic, what would be his attitude towards other religions? Would he be open to interreligious dialogue? On what grounds would he carry on such interreligious dialogue?

Let us state beforehand that Augustine had apparently written very little on interreligious dialogue (and he did so only indirectly or implicitly, if ever). Only a few of his recently discovered sermons concerning religion have survived and come down to us. The closest writings with interreligious insights he has left us are those concerning the relationship between the Jews and the Christians of his time.<sup>12</sup> He did have some personal encounters with Jews living in Africa.<sup>13</sup> This scarcity of writings has led some scholars to affirm that, as far as other religions are concerned, the bishop of Hippo either took no interest in them at all or that he adopted different approaches in dealing with the Jews, non-Catholic Christians, and pagans in general.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that his apparent lack of interest in other religions was due to the fact that he already had much to deal with as far as schismatic and heretical Christian groups were concerned.<sup>15</sup> Think, for example, of the Donatists,

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<sup>12</sup>Possidius lists down some works Augustine wrote against the Jews, some of which have been proven to be spurious. Among the authentic ones we may mention *Ep.* 196 to Ascellus and *Adversus Iudaeos*. The Bishop of Hippo also makes sporadic reference to the Jews in his other writings (e.g. in some parts of *Contra Faust. Man.*, *De civ. Dei*, *De vera rel.*, etc.). While Augustine generally assumes a rather critical and negative attitude towards the Jewish religion, sometimes he does see some positive aspects of it.

<sup>13</sup>He alludes to some Jews in Africa in *Ep.* 71.5, *Ep.* 8\*; *De civ. Dei* 22.8; *Sermones* 9, 17, 325.4, 112A.13, 196.4; etc.

<sup>14</sup>As to the use of different methods in dealing with pagans, other Christians, and members of other religions, Augustine says: "Everyone uses the method which he sees to be suitable to those with whom he has to do": *De vera rel.* 10.20. For example, when dealing with the high-minded and noble pagans, he would use intellectual debates, learned and long treatises, and books, while in dealing with humble and simple folks, he would use sermons, letters, and personal interviews. Cf. R. W. BATTENHOUSE, *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, New York, Oxford University Press 1955, p. 79.

As regards Augustine's apparent lack of interest in other religions aside from Judaism, D. X. Burt says that this was "a responsibility that he did not feel towards the multitude of other theological species wandering on earth ..... [He] felt no special duty to 'compel them to come in.' This he could leave in the hands of God": D. X. BURT, *Friendship & Society*, Grand Rapids (Michigan), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1999, p. 221.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. J. J. O'MEARA, *Young Augustine. The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind up to his Conversion*, London, Longmans, Green and Co. 1965, p. 30.

the Pelagians, and the Arians<sup>16</sup> against whom Augustine engaged in active polemic.

As to Augustine's familiarity with other religions, one must keep in mind that, like the other Fathers of the Church of the early centuries, the coverage of his knowledge coincided with the limitations of the geographical extent of the Roman Empire at that time, with its maximum expansion reaching only as far as Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) to the east, Spain to the west, England to the north and North Africa and Egypt to the south.<sup>17</sup> Outside these confines was a totally unknown world to him. Hence, all those religions in the Far East (comprising modern India, China, Japan, etc.) that we know today, which may be far more ancient than the Roman Empire itself,<sup>18</sup> were unknown to him and there was no way we could say anything about them.

It must also be pointed out that interreligious dialogue goes well beyond the question of whether salvation exists outside the Catholic Church or not. The doctrine of *salus extra ecclesiam* is already clearly defined in the Catholic magisterium.<sup>19</sup> Augustine himself has already

<sup>16</sup>Arianism started in the early fourth century long before Augustine was born. However, some Arians were still active in Italy even during Augustine's days. In his autobiography, for example, he recalls how during the Holy Week of the year 386 Justina, mother of the boy emperor Valentinian II, persecuted the Catholic Church in Milan (represented by Bishop Ambrose) "in the interests of the Arian heresy by which she had been led astray": *Conf.* 9.7.15. The same event is related in Ambrose's *Ep.* 20.21 and Paulinus of Nola's *Vita Amb.* 13. Also see E. TeSELLE, *Augustine*, Nashville, Abingdon Press 2006, p. 5. After the fall of Rome in 410, some Arians migrated to Hippo and started spreading their heretical ideas in Africa. Augustine mentions them, for example, in *Sermo* 40.7. He describes Arianism here like a cadaver in a state of decomposition (*quasi cadaveris putrescentis*).

<sup>17</sup>P. F. BEATRICE, *Introduction to the Fathers of the Church*, Vicenza, Edizioni Istituto San Gaetano di Vicenza 1987 (original version in Italian, 1983), p. 13. These are all territories surrounding the Mediterranean Basin.

<sup>18</sup>Hinduism, for example, is believed to have roots dating back to 3000 century BC or even earlier, while Buddhism dates back to the 5th century BC. These two ancient religions already existed in the Far East even before the time of the Roman Empire, but they remained totally unknown to both Greek and Latin authors of the early centuries notwithstanding the fact that there were already previous contacts between the West and the Far East. Think, for example, of Alexander the Great's incursion into the Indus Valley (in northern India) in the 4th century BC. The Greeks then believed that India was the limit of the entire known world.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. *LG* 14, while affirming the necessity of the Church (specifically

admitted this possibility when he explains what “salvation within the Church” means. He says: “It is clear that when we speak of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the church we should have the heart and mind, not the body”.<sup>20</sup> In other words, salvation is not so much a question of formal membership to a particular religion or institutional church, but of being faithful to one’s religious convictions. It is a question of the “heart and mind”.

In our present paper, we cannot explore all the possible answers to the questions we have posted earlier due to limitation of time. We shall, then, limit ourselves to presenting only what we think are three possible Augustinian grounds for interreligious dialogue. They are the results mostly of logical inferences either by analogy or by extension, and not by direct or explicit reference to some elaborate treatment of the argument on the part of Augustine.

### **Ecclesiological ground**

The Catholic magisterium insists on the necessity of the church for salvation.<sup>21</sup> *Extra ecclesiam salus non est*. Augustine would not

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of the Catholic Church) for salvation, qualifies that being a part of it does not refer to “bodily” membership, but is a question of the “heart”. CCC 837 further states that anyone who “does not persevere in charity is not saved”. Thus, formal membership to the Catholic Church does not guarantee automatic salvation. The doors of salvation are open even to members of other religions who “seek God with a sincere heart and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience”: LG 16 as cited in CCC 847.

The term *salus* in the 2nd century Latin originally had only the prosaic connotation of physical health. However, it later began to take on a moral and eschatological meaning implying the liberation of the soul on earth and its eternal happiness in heaven. In other words, it assumed the transcendental connotation of “salvation”. Cf. J. CARCOPINO, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>20</sup>*Bapt. contra Don.* 5.28.39. Cf. *ibid.*, 3.19.26; 5.18.24; and *In Joh. ev. tr.* 61.2. The idea that salvation can exist only within the Church was first indirectly affirmed by Cyprian of Carthage (ca. 210-258). In *De cath. eccl. unit.* 1.6 he writes: “If those who remained outside Noah’s ark could be saved, then he who remains outside the Church can also be saved”. He affirmed this in the context of a schism caused by Felicissimo in Africa and Novatian in Rome.

<sup>21</sup>UR 3 (quoted in CCC 816): “For it is only through Christ’s Catholic Church, which is ‘the all-embracing means of salvation’, that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation”. However, LG 14 speaks rather of the “Church” in two senses – in general and as referring specifically to the Catholic Church – and affirms that belonging to such “Church” is necessary for salvation. On the Church’s being “the universal sacrament of salvation”, cf. LG 48 and AG 1 (as

have any difficulty accepting this, being an active pastor in the African soil where the teachings of Cyprian of Carthage were held in very high esteem.<sup>22</sup> But the question is more on the concept of the “church” that one has in mind. Does it refer and limit itself to the confines of the institutional Catholic Church?

Many Christian groups were claiming to be the “true Church” during Augustine’s time. In Africa, the tension between the Catholics and the Donatists then was quite high, which oftentimes resulted in violent encounters. The Bishop of Hippo had to defend the Catholic teachings about the nature and the mission of the Church against the erroneous ecclesiology of his opponents. But in doing so, he went beyond offering a limited “catholic” definition of the “church”. Let us put things in their proper perspective to understand his idea, in this regard.

Every religion has its own set of observances, a cult or a liturgy of its own, forms of service, a particular way of praying and worshipping, and so forth.<sup>23</sup> They are supposed to facilitate man’s entering into a contact with a god or a divinity or a Supreme Being. Such practices tend to become institutionalized in time. We see the same movement when we talk about religious beliefs or faiths.<sup>24</sup> They may start as something purely personal

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cited in CCC 849).

<sup>22</sup>Refer to footnote 20.

<sup>23</sup>This is what religion is all about, according to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). For him, religion is a moral (not theological) virtue concerned with actions – that is, the performance of services and rites in honor of a superior nature called divine. It is giving to God what is owed to him – that is, the honor that he deserves. As such, it is related to justice. Furthermore, making reference to Augustine, he says that religion is an instrument that man uses to honor God through faith, hope and love. Cf. *Summa Theo.* vol. 39, 81.1 and 81.5 (= Chapter 10 in the translation of T. McDERMOTT, *St. Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologiae. A Concise Translation*, Westminster (Maryland), Christian Classics 1992, pp. 400ff.). As to religious services and rites, Augustine explicitly says that those who are from other religions and have other doctrines should not participate in other religions’ services and rites. Cf. *De vera rel.* 5.8.

<sup>24</sup>Faith is often described as man’s submission of his intellect and will to God (*DV* 5; CCC 143). Man gives his assent to God and freely submits his will to what he hears from God or to the truth revealed to him (CCC 144). Augustine further distinguishes between “faith” and “religion”. In *De vera rel.* 1.1 he rejects the notion of religion as a purely private undertaking and stresses its public and corporate dimension. In *De vera rel.* 25.46, on the other hand, he explains how Christianity, as a religion, harmonizes the public and the private, and is not concerned only with the private individual, but with the

and spiritual, but later they move towards some institutionalization. The more we progress in time, the more institutionalized our religious beliefs become and they wander farther away from their purely spiritual roots as believers focus more on structures, rituals, traditions, etc. Thus, the desire to be in communion with God or some divinity or Supreme Being, or to establish a relationship with him is oftentimes overshadowed by more institutional concerns; it takes a backseat, so to speak. Therefore, we reach the point of putting one religion against another, underscoring their differences rather than looking at what they have in common. We, then, start to identify religion with institutionalized churches and formal religions – Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so forth – each one with its own social structures, rules and regulations, religious practices, traditions, etc.

Now when we say that “there is no salvation outside the church”, we usually think of an institutionalized religion. For Augustine, the emergence of the institutional religion is just a particular moment in the revelation or historical manifestation of the “church” in a more spiritual sense. Commenting on *Lk* 13:7-9 he speaks of three stages in God’s “visitation” of humanity. He says: “The Lord visited the human race for a kind of three years, that is to say, through three particular ages. The first age, before the law (*ante legem*); the second age, under the law (*in lege*); the third is now, which is the age of grace (*tempus gratiae*). I mean, if he had not visited the human race before the law, where would Abel have sprung from, or Enoch, or Noah, or Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? He wanted to be known as the Lord of these, and while all nations were in fact his ... And if he had not come visiting in time of the law, he would not have given the law. After the law, the householder came in person; he suffered, died and rose again; he gave the Holy Spirit; he had the gospel preached throughout the world. And still some tree has

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entire human race. In contrast, “faith” would be more private and individual, a purely personal undertaking. Cf. T. CLEMMONS, “The Common, History, and the Whole: Guiding Themes in *De vera religione*” in *Augustinianum*, Year 58, Fasc. 1 (June 2018), pp. 131ff. Thomas Aquinas somewhat agrees with this distinction when he defines faith as “an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace” (cf. *Summa Theo.* II-II 2.9 as cited in the CCC 155). It is God who reveals the truth to the human mind and every individual man must give his assent to it. Religion, on the other hand, is more public in character since it involves the performance of services and rites – see footnote 20.

remained unfruitful. There is still some part of the human race; it is still not correcting itself".<sup>25</sup>

The "church" was originally just communion between God and man. It resulted from man's desire to establish a relationship with a Supreme Being, to whom people give various names (like the Filipino "*Bathala*", the Aristotelian "*God*", the Jewish "*Yahweh*", the Muslim "*Allah*", the Hindu "*Brahman*", Mahayana School's "*Buddha*", the Neo-Confucian "*Li*", Chu Hsi's the "*Great Principle*" or the "*Great Ultimate*", the Sikh "*Akal Murat*", etc.). For Augustine, the concrete face or revelation of God is Christ himself, through whom salvation is realized.<sup>26</sup> However, he does not exclude the possibility that the same Savior may reveal himself to other people under different names and in different ways.<sup>27</sup> Interreligious dialogue, in this case, would require that we go back to the very spiritual roots of religion and go beyond ecclesiastical institutions, structures, and even names.

In his desire to explain what Christians and Jews have in common, for example, Augustine says that the "true Church" already existed long before the Incarnation or the coming of Jesus Christ into the world for it included also the "chosen people" of the Old Testament and not only those who came to know, accepted and believed in him later. Thus he says: "You should not think that the church is only present in those who became holy after the coming and birth of Jesus. All the saints of every period belong to the church ... How can we then exclude Abraham from the church?"<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>*Sermo* 72.3 preached in Carthage in August of the year 397.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. *Ex. Gal.* 27; *Ep.* 11.2-4.

<sup>27</sup>R. DODARO, "The Secret Justice of God and the Gift of Humility", *Augustinian Studies* 34:1 (2003), pp. 85-86, says: "In discussing this possibility (sc. that Christ may choose to reveal himself to individuals in some manner or other even outside the Christian Church) here and in other of his texts, Augustine at no time requires that the individuals concerned identify the savior who reveals himself to them as Jesus Christ".

<sup>28</sup> *Sermo* 4.11. In the *De civ. Dei* 17.12 Augustine speaks of Christians as some sort of "hidden" Israelites ... "not by physical descent, but by spiritual kinship". T. van Bavel explains: "... from the moment that people are called to holiness, there is church on earth ... The reason for this statement is that at certain moments they were the only righteous and, from the beginning of the world, all the righteous have Christ as their head": T. J. VAN BAVEL, "Church", in *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia* (ed. Allan Fitzgerald), Grand Rapids (Michigan) / Cambridge, William Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1999, p. 170. E. TeSelle adds: "The saints in Israel were already members of the whole



We may say by extension that the “true Church” already existed even before distinct institutionalized religions came about. By “church” we refer here to man’s spiritual desire to establish a relationship with a Supreme Being. The different ways by which man has thought of bringing this about may vary from religion to religion. Sometimes the formulation itself of what others term as “fundamental truths of faith” may change. Thus, Christians have their own set of truths, Muslims have their own set of truths, Buddhists have their own set of truths, etc. Unfortunately, sometimes such formulations may contradict one another making interreligious dialogue reach an insurmountable impasse.<sup>29</sup> To overcome this, Augustine would invite us to return to the fundamental roots of religion itself – the very origin of the “church”.

An inflexible defense on the part of any religion of its own dogmatic formulations is not a good path to take when one disembarks on an interreligious dialogue. It proves to be counterproductive. Christians are oftentimes guilty of adopting this approach. Augustine, on the other hand, admits the possibility that “Christ may still choose to reveal himself to individuals in some form other than in the Christian dispensation ... [He] is convinced that Christian theology must not rule out the possibility”.<sup>30</sup> Thus in one of the recently discovered sermons of Augustine, specifically in the so-called *Sermones Dolbeau*,<sup>31</sup> he writes:

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Christ in process of birth, putting forth a hand and other parts of the body before the head emerged”: E. TeSELLE, “The Church and the Sacraments: Unity in Grace across Space and Time”, in *Augustine*, Nashville (TE), Abingdon Press 2006, p. 51. Cf. *De cat. rud.* 3.6 and 19.33.

29 Take, for example, the way various religions speak about God or the Supreme Being. The different notions of God and the names they give to him that we find in other religions sometimes appear contradictory. In this case, let us recall what CCC 40-43 say about the limitations of our knowledge of God and of human language as well.

<sup>30</sup>R. DODARO, “The Secret Justice of God and the Gift of Humility”, *Augustinian Studies* 34:1 (2003), p. 85.

<sup>31</sup>These are part of the “Mainz collections” (nos. 5, 7, 9, 12-13, 21, 24, 27, 40-42, 44-48, 50-52, 54-55, 59-63) recently discovered by F. Dolbeau in a 15th century homiliary. Some of these sermons were either mutilated, truncated, or rewritten. These were published in different editions of the *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* or *RÉtAug* (Paris, Études Augustiniennes), specifically in *RÉtAug* 35 (1989): 432; *RÉtAug* 40 (1994): 290-298; and *RÉtAug* 41 (1995): 281-288, as well as in the *Recherches Augustiniennes* (Paris, Études Augustiniennes) or *RechAug* 28 (1995): 53-65. Also see F. DOLBEAU, *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique*, Paris, Institut des Études Augustiniennes 1996.

“One must not say anything rashly about those who have not worshipped any idols, nor bound themselves over to Chaldean or magical rituals, in case perhaps it has escaped our notice how the Savior, without whom nobody can be saved, has revealed himself to them *in some manner or other*.”<sup>32</sup> The way God (or Christ, for Christians) reveals himself to people determines the way they formulate their own “truths of faith” or dogmas. Now, the different ways by which Christ reveals himself even to people outside the confines of the Catholic Church logically leaves space for various dogmatic formulations. “Taken in its full context” – R. Dodaro writes – “Augustine’s statement allows for a new revelation in which Christ manifests himself as the savior to individuals who are following a pathway ... that does not explicitly involve Christian teachings or sacraments”.<sup>33</sup>

### Eudemonistic ground<sup>34</sup>

The story of Augustine is an open book. He himself tells his own story in his famous autobiography, *The Confessions*. There we see that in the beginning, his search for truth took on the guise of a personal search for happiness and restlessness.<sup>35</sup> He thought that he could find happiness by surrounding himself with friends, by satisfying his sensual desires, by hankering after fame, wealth and money, and so forth.<sup>36</sup> It was only later that he realized that true happiness could be attained only by establishing a personal relationship with God, who is the Truth itself (*Jn* 14:6).

The theme of man’s search for happiness is a recurring theme in the writings of Augustine. We see him treat it in his earliest works (such as in *De beata vita* and *Soliloquia* – both written in 386-387 immediately

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<sup>32</sup>*Sermo Dolbeau* 26.37 (underscoring is ours).

<sup>33</sup>R. DODARO, *ibid*.

<sup>34</sup>This comes from the Greek term *eudaimonía* (“happiness, fortune, good luck, opulence”, etc.). People believed that it consisted in the possession of some “good spirit” (*eu – daimōn*). For the various nuances and meanings of these terms, see H. G. LIDDELL – R. SCOTT, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press/Clarendon Press 1996, pp. 365 and 708.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Vatican II declaration NA 2 recognizes how “other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing ‘ways,’ comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites.”

<sup>36</sup>“Human vanity”, as Augustine collectively calls worldly pursuits. Cf. *Conf.* 3.4.7.

after his moral conversion)<sup>37</sup> and even in his late works (like *De Trinitate* composed in 399-426). It was the same desire (among other things) that drew him to the Manicheans<sup>38</sup> during his younger years (373-384) and to the Academics<sup>39</sup> during his brief sojourn in Rome (383-384).

All men desire to be happy,<sup>40</sup> and this can take on various forms. Religion is just one of the many means by which we can attain happiness. In his monumental work *The City of God*, Augustine explains how only “true religion” can make man happy.<sup>41</sup> By “true religion” he refers to the worship of the one true God. Now, while one may argue as to who the one true God is (and proponents of various religions are very polemical, in this regard), what one cannot deny is the fact that one embraces a particular religion or tries to enter into a relationship with a god or some Supreme Being in his desire to be happy, either in the present life or in the after-life.<sup>42</sup> A religion that does not promise you happiness in one

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<sup>37</sup>These works were the result of the philosophical conversations that transpired at Cassiciacum. The theme of happiness, certitude and evil were the first ones discussed by Augustine and his companions during their brief sojourn at Cassiciacum (from late 386 to early 387). Cf. A. TRAPÈ, *Saint Augustine. Man, Pastor, Mystic*, New York, Catholic Publishing Co. 1986, p. 110.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. K. E. LEE, *Augustine, Manichaeism and the Good*, Ottawa, St. Paul University (dissertation), 1997, pp. 52ff. In footnote 88 on p. 52 we read: “It is likely that Augustine, as is true with many of his other ideas, forms his own notion of the happy life by drawing from a variety of sources and Manichaean inspiration is one of them.”

<sup>39</sup>Augustine was initially fascinated by the Academics (skeptics), whom he encountered during his short stay in Rome (383-384). They talked about happiness, affirming that the wise man alone is happy. They taught that what makes man happy is the constant search for truth, which is tantamount to wisdom. However, they also asserted that truth is unattainable. Augustine argues by saying that one cannot be happy unless he attains or possesses what he desires ... truth, in this case. Hence, only the possession of truth can make man happy. Cf. G. O’DALLY, “The response to skepticism and the mechanisms of cognition”, in E. STUMP – N. KRETZMANN (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, Cambridge UK, Cambridge University Press 2001, pp. 160-161.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. *De beata vita* 10; 2.10; *De Trin.* 13.5.8; *De lib. arb.* 2.13.36.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. *De civ. Dei* 4.23. The same idea is present in *De vera rel.* 1.1: “The way of the good and blessed life is to be found entirely in the true religion wherein one God is worshipped and acknowledged with purest piety ....”

<sup>42</sup>Augustine discusses the pursuit of happiness in the first ten books of his *De civitate Dei*. He refutes the pagans’ false teachings concerning worship for the procurement of happiness either in the present life (books 1-5) or in the afterlife (books 6-10).

way or another is worthless.<sup>43</sup> Thus Augustine writes: “If I were to ask you why you have believed in Christ, why you have become Christians, every man will answer truly, ‘For the sake of happiness’.”<sup>44</sup>

Happiness consists in the possession of an object or objects which one believes can make him happy. “Happy is he who has what he wants.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, for some, happiness consists in gaining material or worldly benefits; some say that it consists in having internal peace of mind; others would say that happiness consists in full self-realization; for others, it consists in being one or being in perfect harmony with nature; others still hope to find happiness by detachment from material things; and so forth. Whatever face happiness assumes, many believe that a rapport with a god or some Supreme Being is necessary in order to attain it.

Talking about the many possible objects of happiness, Augustine distinguishes between things that can make man happy only temporarily or momentarily (like money, power, fame, physical beauty, etc.) and things that can make man happy permanently. The former ought to be used by man (*uti*) in view of something else, while the latter must be loved in themselves (*frui*).<sup>46</sup> On top of the objects of one’s love or desire and which should be enjoyed *per se* he places God. He is the only eternal, unchangeable reality to be enjoyed, while the rest are to be used only.<sup>47</sup> Only by possessing God can man become truly and permanently happy.<sup>48</sup>

The common search for happiness or eudemonistic quest is another possible ground for interreligious dialogue. Religions may indicate various ways of attaining it,<sup>49</sup> but if true happiness were to exist,

<sup>43</sup>“In Augustine’s thought it is not possible to separate the idea of religion from the notion of happiness .... Since the desire for happiness, ‘the blessed life,’ is the root of all human activity, the desire for happiness lies also at the basis of all religious activity”: P. SCHRODT, “Religion” in *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia* (ed. Allan Fitzgerald), Grand Rapids (Michigan) / Cambridge, William Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1999, p. 711.

<sup>44</sup>*Sermo* 150.4.

<sup>45</sup>*De beata vita* 10.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. *De doct. chr.* 1.4.4.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. *De doct. chr.* 1.22.20; *De mor. eccl. cath.* 20.37; etc.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. *De lib. arb.* 2.16.41: “Happy is he who has God”. God is the *summum bonum*. Hence Augustine writes in *De Gen. adv. Man.* 1.20.31: “No one is happy unless through the highest good.” Also see *De beata vita* 11 and *De div. quaest. oct. trib.* 35.1.

<sup>49</sup>NA 2 explicitly says that the ideal of Hinduism consists in “freedom from the anguish of human condition either through ascetical practices or

it must ultimately come just from one source. Augustine found happiness in possessing the God<sup>50</sup> of the Catholic faith. This does not mean, however, that it could not be found by others who belong to other faiths or religions. It would be interesting to know what the different religions nowadays teach about what can make man happy. Are they more focused on the things of the present life (such as health, material possessions, power, etc.), or do they focus more on permanent realities to be enjoyed in the after-life?

Every man has the right to seek his own happiness. Augustine explains that it all depends on the objects that one pursues and which he believes can make him happy. No one has the right to impose his personal search on others. The same things hold true when we talk about religions. It is enough that every man be guided by his conscience in his pursuit of happiness and he must be respected in his personal choice. Let him enter into a relationship with a god or a Supreme Being of his choice if he thinks that such god or Being can make him happy. Augustine would exhort us with these words: "I put it quite bluntly. They believed that happiness is the gift of some god, unknown to them. Then let them seek him and worship him, and that is enough".<sup>51</sup>

It is quite absurd that people belonging to different religions nowadays fight and even kill one another in their quest for happiness, whereas religion is supposed to facilitate man's search for happiness. Some believers manifest their conviction that if man were to be happy, he must embrace their religion. Augustine found himself in a similar situation during his polemic with the Donatists of his days, who believed that theirs was the only one true church and, hence, the only means of salvation for humanity. When the Catholics questioned their position, the Donatists used every occasion to get even with them and often resorted to violence by availing themselves of the service of the so-called *circumcellions*.<sup>52</sup> The violence that such hired mercenaries committed is

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profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust", while for Buddhism it consists in "the state of perfect liberation" or the attainment "by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination". The Muslims, on the other hand, also believe in the resurrection of the dead and in God's final judgment: cf. NA 3.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. *De lib. arb.* 2.16.41; 2.13.35; *De civ. Dei* 8.8.

<sup>51</sup>*De civ. Dei* 4.25.

<sup>52</sup>Augustine traces the name of this revolutionary group to the Latin words "*circum cellae*" since many believed that its members lived or roamed around the tombs of the martyrs (*cellae*) in search for food. Cf. *En. in Ps.* 132.3;

not very different from the modern-day cry for a “holy war” raised by some fanatical extremist religious groups. The Bishop of Hippo would not have resorted to violent means in his defense of the Catholic truth nor forced anyone to join the Catholic Church. Instead he believed in the power of reasoning and dialogue.

### Anthropological ground

One big obstacle to interreligious dialogue is pride, closed mindedness and a sense of self-righteousness on the part of members of various religions. There is a very strong tendency to find faults in other religions and the tendency to judge and condemn them as erroneous or false. Hence, instead of appreciating what is good in other believers,<sup>53</sup> many focus more on how to convert them to their own beliefs. “Our religion is the one true religion” is a common battle cry on the part of many religions today – both Christian and non-Christian. Thus, many feel that they must convert the entire humanity to their own faith. Augustine, on the contrary, had always remained open to dialogue with members of other religions or churches. In fact, he was willing to change his religion if somebody succeeded in demonstrating him wrong.<sup>54</sup> This is a true spirit of humility – the antidote to human pride.<sup>55</sup>

Humility is to be promoted not only as a virtue and antidote to pride. It is also links believers belonging to different religions or churches.<sup>56</sup> Without humility, man cannot really open himself up to God

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*Contra Gaud.* 1.28.32. On one occasion he almost fell victim to the group. Thus he wrote in *Ench.* 17: “It has happened to myself to take the wrong road where two ways met, so that I did not pass by the place where an armed band of Donatists lay in wait for me. Yet I arrived at the place whither I was bent, though by a roundabout route; and when I heard of the ambush, I congratulated myself on my mistake and gave thanks to God for it.”

<sup>53</sup>Cf. *NA* 2.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. J. RIST, “Augustine’s Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century” in *Saint Augustine* (ed. Tarcisius J. van Bavel), Brussels, Mercatorfonds / Heverlee, The Augustinian Historical Institute 2007, p. 288.

<sup>55</sup>cf. *Sermo* 159B.11 where Augustine exalts the humility of Christ as the way by which he cured human pride, “the root cause of all disorders”. In *Ep.* 140.37.83 the African bishop likens the Pelagians to the Jews. Both groups were like branches “cut off” from the olive tree (cf. *Rom* 11:17-19) because of pride – i.e. they preferred their own justice to the justice of God.

<sup>56</sup>R. DODARO, “The Secret Justice of God and the Gift of Humility”, *Augustinian Studies* 34:1 (2003), p. 83, writes: “Properly considered in terms of

or to a Supreme Being. Religion presupposes a sense of inadequacy on man's part and, thus, the need to open one's self to a higher being capable of helping him realize his goal or attain the ultimate object of his desire. This was one of Augustine's criticisms of some ancient Greek philosophers who, while they were able to reason correctly to the existence of the true God, failed to establish a proper relationship with him either because they relied only on their own efforts in their attempt to reach him (thus excluding the need for a mediator) or, if ever they realized their need for a mediator they employed theurgical rites and supplicated spiritual beings subordinate to God, or because they failed to purify themselves due to lack of humility.<sup>57</sup>

Much study has been conducted on Augustine's interpretation of the Christian virtue of humility. It has been demonstrated that, for him, the *via humilitatis* – patterned after the humility of Christ<sup>58</sup> – is the only path that leads to God and that should define Christian behavior. It heals man from the original sin; it is a fundamental attitude that should accompany Christian prayer; a series of attitudes are inspired by it (such as spiritual detachment, perseverance, modesty of the heart, and patience); and so forth. As such, it was “intended as the path of access to the Father. It worked to effect the reconciliation with God and fellow human beings .... [It] gave humanity the possibility of participation in the work of redemption.”<sup>59</sup> Again, reasoning by extension, we may say that what the Bishop of Hippo says about Christian humility may hold true also for other religions. As a fundamental attitude, it may also pave the way to God (whatever name he takes) or some Supreme Being, unify

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the whole of Augustine's intention, humility links peoples across confessional lines through an election that is hidden in the secret justice of God ....” On p. 87 he writes: “It is true that the *via humilitatis* that God embraced by entering into history is the sole pathway to salvation; however, it is also a universal pathway. As such, humility becomes a criterion for evaluating all soteriologies, while it also provides something of a common ground between them, should there be other, valid explanations for salvation than that provided by the Christian religion.”

<sup>57</sup>Cf. R. DODARO, *ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. B. BRUNING, “Pride and Humility” in *Saint Augustine* (ed. Tarcisius J. van Bavel), *op. cit.*, pp. 278ff.

<sup>59</sup>A. VERWILGHEN, “Jesus Christ: Source of Christian Humility” in *Augustine and the Bible* (tr. Pamela Bright), Notre Dame (Indiana), University of Notre Dame Press 1999, pp. 303-304. Original version by A. M. LA BONNARDIÈRE, *Bible de tous les temps*, vol. 3: *Saint Augustin et la Bible* (Paris, Beauchesne 1986).

all human beings and help man realize the reason for which he decided to embrace a religion.

Moreover, in the context of interreligious dialogue, humility would help believers of various religions realize their own limitations in terms, for example, of understanding and knowing God, the different ways by which they try to establish a relationship with him, the formulation of their teachings, the efficacy of the means they use to realize their goal, and so forth. The limitation man has in knowing God or the Supreme Being results in the limitation in the way religions formulate their respective dogmas and the so-called “truths of faith”. One and the same God may reveal himself in different ways to different peoples and in different times. He may likewise indicate different ways for man to follow in order to establish a relationship with him. This would explain why religions sometimes have varying notions of a divine being and propose many ways of reaching him. Humility, in this case, would prevent any believer from being too dogmatic and from imposing his own beliefs on others as the absolute truth. On the contrary, he would open his mind to what is true in other religions and thus engage in a healthy dialogue.

Augustine has always been depicted as a passionate searcher for truth, and rightly so. His whole life was a search for truth in its various forms or manifestations. He affirms that no one has the monopoly of the truth. “The truth is neither mine nor yours, but the patrimony of all,” he says.<sup>60</sup> There is an element of truth in all men – thus, in all believers of any religion. This does not mean, of course, that everything is relative, for he does believe in the existence of the absolute truth. He would rather say: “There is an immutable truth, containing all things that are immutably true, which you cannot say is yours or mine or any one man’s, but that in some wonderful way a mysterious and universal light, as it were, is present and proffers itself to all in common.”<sup>61</sup> The existence of truth in all men opens the way to a humble and open-minded interreligious dialogue. The truths present in the different religions cannot contradict one another. Otherwise they are not real truths but mere truth-likeness (*verisimilitudo*) or appearances of the truth.

Lastly, humility can also help us acknowledge the various errors that we have committed in the past, the battles we have waged in the name of religion, the wrong judgments and impressions we have of one another, and so forth.

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<sup>60</sup>*En. in Ps.* 75.17; 103.2.11.

<sup>61</sup>*De lib. arb.* 2.12.33.



History shows us how members of different religions at certain points in time have committed mistakes. They sometimes commit acts of fanaticism, extremism, violence, etc.<sup>62</sup> The Catholic Church, for her part, has had her own share of mistakes for which the late Pope and now St. John Paul II had once publicly asked for forgiveness.<sup>63</sup> Think, for example, (aside from those explicitly mentioned by the Pope) of the horrors committed during the time of the Inquisition, the violation of human life that accompanied the crusades, the sufferings inflicted on countless Jews in concentration camps, and so forth. Augustine knows that on man's part, committing mistakes is inevitable. No one is perfect and no matter how good our intentions are, we still commit mistakes. But while committing mistakes cannot be avoided, what we can avoid is the tendency to condemn people for the mistakes they commit.

Sometimes members of other religions can be quite unforgiving.<sup>64</sup> They never forget the mistakes that people commit and they would seize any occasion to make them suffer for it. In this way an atmosphere of mistrust always looms in the air, hindering any sincere attempt at interreligious dialogue. Augustine, in this case, would remind us that no matter what, man deserves respect. He must be loved independently of the mistakes that he makes. The African bishop abided by this simple principle: "Love for man, hatred of sin".<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>The Catholic Church decries any form of hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, and the likes against the Jews – cf. *NA* 4 – and denounces the various quarrels and hostilities that had arisen between Christians and Muslims – cf. *NA* 3.

<sup>63</sup>In the homily he delivered last March 12, 2020 on the occasion of the "Year of Pardon." Part of it reads: "... we cannot fail to recognize the infidelities to the Gospel committed by some of our brethren, especially during the second millennium. Let us ask pardon for the divisions which have occurred among Christians, for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes taken towards the followers of other religions. Let us confess, even more, our responsibilities as Christians for the evils of today. We must ask ourselves what our responsibilities are regarding atheism, religious indifference, secularism, ethical relativism, the violations of the right to life, disregard for the poor in many countries."

<sup>64</sup>The Vatican II declaration on the relation of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions – the *Nostra Aetate* (dated Oct. 28, 1965) – exhorts us all "to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding": *NA* 3.

<sup>65</sup>*Reg.* 4.28.

Love for man<sup>66</sup> should be at the very foundation of any interreligious dialogue. It entails the recognition of every human person's dignity and fundamental rights, which in turn is expressed through mutual respect and openness.<sup>67</sup> In other words, independently of one's religion or faith, the human person must be loved and respected. It is absurd to destroy man in the name of religion. All of us simply seek happiness and try to establish a relationship with some god or Supreme Being who we believe can make us happy. To destroy a human being means to deprive him of the chance to fulfill such desires, which in the first place religions are supposed to help us fulfill.

## Conclusion

If Augustine were still alive today, he would probably be actively engaged in interreligious dialogue. In our short reflection we have presented only three possible grounds for interreligious dialogue based on his teachings and examples – viz. ecclesiological ground, eudemonic ground and anthropological ground.

As to the ecclesiological ground, Augustine challenges us to rethink our own understanding of the “church”. He proposes a more spiritual notion of it, tracing its very origin to man's fundamental desire to establish a relationship with God or some Supreme Being. This is something common to all religions. Interreligious dialogue cannot be based on institutional differences among religions and churches. Each one of them has its own institutional structures, observances, discipline, traditions, and so forth. Focusing on such differences will only create further divisions among believers of different faiths and members of

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<sup>66</sup>The way Augustine understood the Gospel precept of “love of neighbor” underwent changes in time. This is quite evident when we read what he says about it in his *De vera religione* (years 390-391) and what he says about it later in *De doctrina christiana* (years 396/426-427). Cf. R. J. TESKE, *To Know God and the Soul. Essays on the Thought of Saint Augustine*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press 2008, pp. 70-90.

<sup>67</sup>NA 5 reads: “No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned. The Church reproves as foreign to the mind of Christ any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or *religion*” (underscoring is ours).

various religions. For Augustine, we have to return to the very spiritual roots of the “church” and go beyond ecclesiastical institutions.

As to the eudemonic ground, another thing that all men, independently of their religious affiliations or church membership, have in common is their desire for happiness. One of the primary reasons why man tries to establish a relationship with God or some Supreme Being is his belief that doing so he can be happy. Religion is supposed to facilitate man’s quest for happiness. Any religion that does not do this is worthless. The life of Augustine shows us how his search for God started with a quest for personal happiness. It was only later that he realized that true happiness consisted in possessing God. He also says that only “true religion” can make man happy. The quest for happiness may take on various forms, but it remains at the very foundation of all religions. Augustine, in this case, upholds religious freedom. Each man must be allowed to seek happiness and to choose the god or Supreme Being whom he thinks can make him happy.

As to the anthropological ground, Augustine teaches us that well beyond religious beliefs man must always be loved and respected. People sometimes commit mistakes when they follow their religious convictions. Members of some religions are often carried away by fanaticism and extremism, resorting even to violence. Believers also tend to focus on the errors of other religions rather than on their good aspects. The Bishop of Hippo also explains how elements of truth exist in all men. No man and no single religion have monopoly of truth. Keeping these things in mind would cultivate an attitude of humility and foster constant love for man while we hate his sins, respect for one another and for fundamental human rights, which are necessary attitudes in carrying on interreligious dialogue.<sup>68</sup>

These three grounds are aptly summarized in Vatican II’s 1964 decree on ecumenism – the *Unitatis Redintegratio*. While the context of this document is ecumenism and not interreligious dialogue,<sup>69</sup> what it says also applies to the latter. Thus we read: “All in the Church must preserve *unity in essentials*. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper *freedom*, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological

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<sup>68</sup>Cf. *UR* 11.

<sup>69</sup>Ecumenism is promotion of unity among the various Christian churches, while interreligious dialogue is promotion of unity among different churches or religions and their members.

elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let *charity* prevail”.<sup>70</sup> These are the same things we have highlighted in presenting Augustine’s insights on interreligious dialogue – unity in essentials, respect for freedom, and charity or love in all things.

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<sup>70</sup>UR 4 (underscoring is ours).

# Miroslav Volf's Theology of Forgiveness: A Pastoral Model for the Church's Social Dimension of Salvation

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Fray Ramon B. Bitancor III, OAR

## Abstract

*Cognizant of the unfavorable results of unforgiveness in the anatomy of human relationships, Volf's theology of forgiveness helps develop a plan of action that Christians can employ to grow in charity, friendship, peace, communion, inclusion, solidarity and reconciliation. Initially, this study explores Volf's theology of forgiveness in the context of generosity, memory and inclusion. Hence, the threefold treatment of forgiveness is measured out to edify the Church's teaching on the social dimension of salvation. Volf's theology of forgiveness hones forgiving personalities, whose ability to give, remember and embrace, are declared fit to participate in Christ's mission of redemption. This study identifies the pastoral relevance of the Volf's theology of forgiveness as a vehicle to arrive at the all-embracing power and purpose of salvation in the whole world.*

## Introduction

Forgiveness is a defining element in the value system of the Christian faith. It has a critical role in the lives of those who seek to live in the ways Jesus Christ taught.<sup>1</sup> Forgiveness sets its importance

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<sup>1</sup> John Monboourquette, *How to Forgive: A Step-by-Step Guide* (Philippines: St. Pauls, 2003), 17.

today. Torn apart by wars and violence, the world suffers from division, setting human beings against one another as they pursue their own well-being.<sup>2</sup> The Church herself is keenly aware of the serious injustices in the human world that build “a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just and more loving world.”<sup>3</sup> On the basis of this, the researcher wants to edify the relevance of forgiveness in the context of salvation to thwart existing realities of injustice, oppression, and violence that consumes human relationships. In particular, the researcher aims to promote Volf’s theology of forgiveness as a pastoral model in the actualization of the social dimension of salvation. The researcher is convinced that such a pastoral model can regulate a more structured, well-directed, and humane social environment. With the belief in the interconnection between forgiveness and salvation, the researcher intends to validate Volf’s theology of forgiveness as pastoral model to contribute to the healing of fractured human relationships and full realization of the social dimension of salvation.

### **Miroslav Volf and His Theology of Forgiveness**

This part consists a brief biography of Volf and recounts some of his personal experiences of injustices that evoked in him the desire to fashion his own theology of forgiveness. Mainly, this part explores the threefold dimension of Volf’s theology forgiveness.

#### **Brief Biography of Miroslav Volf**

Miroslav Volf is a Christian theologian and intellectual who comes from the former Yugoslavia, a country that has witnessed much conflict over the years. His witnessing to violence led him to condemn it, and forged him to look for a way forward from a situation of injustice. Hence, he forecloses the option of revenge, vengeance, and retribution by considering varied dimensions of forgiveness which seek to initiate the transformation of emotions and relationships. “He is an influential Christian theologian, widely known for his works in systematic theology,

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<sup>2</sup>Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (November 24, 2013), § 99 (Philippines, Paulines, 2013), 74.

<sup>3</sup>World Synod of Catholic Bishops 1971, *Justicia in Mundo: Justice in the World*, §3 [://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf](http://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf)

moral ethics, reconciliation and peacemaking, and for his very active role in promoting a theology of forgiveness, non-violence and unity.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Volf's Personal Stories of Forgiveness**

At the beginning of his own meaningful journey towards forgiveness there lies the story of his younger brother's death and his tormenting encounter with *Captain G*.<sup>5</sup> The first account dates back in 1957, when his brother Daniel died. Accordingly, Daniel slipped through the large gate in the courtyard and went to the nearby small military base to play with the soldiers. One of the soldiers who placed Daniel on the horse-drawn bandwagon was held accountable for the accident. However, being convinced that God's love is greater than their accusing hearts, Volf's parents were lead to forgive the soldier himself rather than pressing charges against him. Thus, as they pronounced: “the Word of God tells us to forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us and so we decided to forgive.”<sup>6</sup>

The second account took place in the fall of 1983, when Volf was summoned to compulsory service in the military of then communist Yugoslavia. Spending eight years in prison for crimes he did not commit, he was basically regarded as an enemy of the people. Volf recounts the dreadful memories of interrogations he had endured from a Yugoslavian army security officer, *Captain G*, while under the custody of communist officials.<sup>7</sup> After being release from prison, Volf attempts reconciliation with his interrogator, Captain G. Thus, it was only through Volf's imagined encounters with Captain G that enabled him to move towards forgiveness even without ever having the opportunity to confront the

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<sup>4</sup>CorneliuConstantineanu, “Exclusion and Embrace: Reconciliation in the Works of MiroslavVolf,” *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 7, (2013): 35.

<sup>5</sup>*Captain G* is the code name attributed to the security officer who had worked under the secret communist military service of Yugoslavia. He imputed Volf with threats, interrogations, accusations and charges. His encounter with Captain G ushered Volf to establish “Remembering Rightly.”

<sup>6</sup>MiroslavVolf, *Free of Charge Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (United States of America: Zondervan, 2005), 122.

<sup>7</sup>*Captain G* is the code name attributed to the security officer who had worked under the secret communist military service of Yugoslavia. He imputed Volf with threats, interrogations, accusations and charges. His encounter with Captain G ushered Volf to establish “Remembering Rightly.”

said officer in person again in his life. Volf testify to this in one of his monologues.<sup>8</sup>

### **Volf's Forgiveness: Nature and Necessity**

Volf points out six important things that compose the nature and necessity of forgiveness. First, *forgiveness is a never-ending process*. For Volf, forgiveness is a practice of living or walking into something. One never gets over the process. It does not end. From the experiences narrated earlier, Volf was able to draw out the motivation that deepened his understanding on forgiveness in the context of suffering, violence, and indignation. Forgiveness, even if it remains incomplete, persons should not stop forgiving.<sup>9</sup> Forgiveness needs to mature and will emerge in its own time. Second, *forgiveness brings persons back to goodness*. For Volf, forgiveness holds a very important purpose in human existence. Not only does it relieve one's own psychological burden, or guilt, but more importantly, forgiveness allows the individual to return to the good and return both the offended and the offender back to the way they ought to live their own lives freed from guilt and freed to live in a more positive way.<sup>10</sup> By way of forgiving, Volf urges victims not to condemn and retaliate against their wrongdoers but to retake them back to goodness and truth by way of forgiving them. Third, *forgiveness is the renewal of relationships*. Volf claims that "a wrongdoing rattles and possibly even undoes a relationship." It is here where the call to forgive needs a response because it is a way to mend broken relationships.<sup>11</sup> Forgiveness becomes a uniquely important way to deal with wrongdoing. Volf believes that this way will help broken relationships be renewed. Fourth, *forgiveness entails loving the ungodly*. Volf concludes that the commitment to love the ungodly is a provision in the exercise of forgiveness.<sup>12</sup> Everyone

<sup>8</sup>By "monologue" the researcher pertains to Volf's decision to forgive Captain G by means of his imagination, since Volf admits the impossibility of coming face to face ever with Captain G in real life. Basically, considering the absence of his wrongdoer, Volf engages himself in an imagined reconciliation alone with having to pretend as if he is talking and forgiving Captain G.

<sup>9</sup>Miroslav Volf, "Consider Forgiveness," Youtube Video. Posted by Fetzer Institute, (September 22, 2009), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8fbjzQcTws>

<sup>10</sup>Volf, "Consider Forgiveness."

<sup>11</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 127.

<sup>12</sup>By "ungodly," Volf points out to individuals whom one considers as his enemy. Ungodly people in the context of Volf's discourse basically refers to people who have oppressed, persecuted, aggressed, abused, injured, and harmed



should stop thinking of others as enemies and truly start seeing them as kinsmen. Only then can people acknowledge that they are loved by God just as He loves their enemies and that they should all be cherishing one another.<sup>13</sup> After all, he realizes that he himself had been redeemed by the God who in Christ died for the redemption of the ungodly.<sup>14</sup> Fifth, ***forgiveness goes against the concept of revenge***. For Volf, revenge is morally wrong and the inclination to it leads to destruction. Revenge abandons the principle of “measure for measure” and, acting out of injured pride and untamed fear, gives itself to punitive excess. Revenge seeks to punish and overindulgently takes from the offender more than what is due.<sup>15</sup> For Volf, punishment is too petty, and it is of no real help. Revenge does not contribute to the solution of existing conflicts. Volf believes it makes things much worse. Sixth, ***forgiveness possesses a social dimension***. Volf attests that forgiveness is part of a larger strategy of overcoming evil with good and bringing about reconciliation.<sup>16</sup> It is not just an individual change of feelings, attitudes, or actions but an event between people.<sup>17</sup> Volf reveals that: “forgiveness is an interpersonal, and, in that sense also social event. It is not only something that happens in the mind and heart of the one who forgives, but also occurs between the forgiver and the forgiven.”<sup>18</sup>

### Volf's Threefold Model of Forgiveness

The basis of Volf's theology of forgiveness is drawn from Volf's three major works<sup>19</sup> that developed the concept of forgiveness in the

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victims. In a self-explanatory understanding of the term, to speak of being ungodly would mean to perform actions which are contradictory to the charity towards others and the love of God.

<sup>13</sup>Antoinette Bosco, *Radical Forgiveness* (Mumbai, India: St. Pauls, 2009), 37.

<sup>14</sup>Miroslav Volf, “God's Forgiveness and Ours: Memory of Interrogations, Interrogation of Memory,” *The Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 2 (2007), 218.

<sup>15</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 159.

<sup>16</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 217.

<sup>17</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 183.

<sup>18</sup>Ramon Bitancor to Miroslav Volf. “Consultations for Thesis on the Theology of Forgiveness,” personal email (8 December, 2018).

<sup>19</sup>This refers to Volf's books namely: *Free of Charge Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, and *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*.

lens of three important aspects: *mode of generosity*, *the injunction of remembering rightly*, and *the metaphor of embrace*.

### ***Forgiveness in the Culture of Giving***

Forgiving is almost the same as giving something to someone who does not deserve it. Nevertheless, every person should forgive and Volf is convinced that forgiveness is to be given like a gift to every person who has wronged, even without expecting anything in return. Fundamentally, *forgiveness is a gift*. Whatever man receives from God is a gift and nothing but a gift. This is true of forgiveness as well. Volf sees forgiveness is a special kind of gift given to the injurer, transgressor or wrongdoer. For Volf, the heart of all reality is a gift-giving God, as the apostle John said “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8), and love in itself is equated with the idea of God Who is fundamentally a gift-giver. This means that He determines the shape of everything as gift-giving- love.<sup>20</sup> Volf compares the act of forgiving with the idea of sending or giving a gift to somebody. Whenever one forgives he gives a gift, and it takes another person to receive that gift; in the case of an offender the way he/she truly receives that gift is by apology or by repentance. Thus, there is a place and a role for repentance in response to forgiveness. Volf is convinced that giving to another person more than what that person deserves, in the same way that he/she receives a gift, is the foundation of forgiveness, because that is exactly what forgiveness is all about.<sup>21</sup>

God the Giver has made men to be givers and obliges them to give the gift of forgiveness to others as well.<sup>22</sup> Persons are at their human best when they give and forgive.<sup>23</sup> Since men’s very existence is a result of God’s grace, if God were to stop giving, humanity would cease to exist.<sup>24</sup> As God’s instruments, therefore, human persons are expected to become instruments of His forgiveness. To elaborate this, Volf uses Luther’s metaphor of flowing: “If the flow were to stop, people would be only receivers, not givers. Men forgive because God forgives. Although their forgiveness is imperfect, men is still capable of echoing God’s forgiveness, and, to understand their own forgiving, they need to start with God’s forgiveness.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Volf, “Giving Forgiveness.”

<sup>21</sup>Volf, “Giving Forgiveness.”

<sup>22</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 136.

<sup>23</sup>Volf, “Giving Forgiveness.”

<sup>24</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 36.

<sup>25</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 131.

A person gives when he/she delights in others or when others are in need. By giving, one enhances his or her joy or make up for their lack. In the case of forgiveness, one forgives when others have wronged him or her; by forgiving, he/she releases others from the burden of their wrongdoing such as their offense, transgression, and debt. This is what makes it more difficult to forgive than to give.<sup>26</sup> Volf maintains that the concept of giving is considerably parallel to forgiving, because both are modes of grace; in both cases, someone gives to the other something that he/she does not necessarily deserve.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, forgiveness entails transcendence. The two definitely emanate from God, Who rises above ordinary beings. In both giving and forgiving, grace is at work.

### ***Forgiveness in the Injunction: Remembering Rightly***

The twofold usage of memory is intertwined. Volf surmises that memory can either be asword or a shield. However, Volf recommends that it is much nobler to prevent personal memories from mutating from a shield into a sword, and to find ways in which it can become a means of reconciliation.<sup>28</sup> Volf believes that memory is relevant to the process of forgiveness. Memories are dependent on the victim's personal choice. One can either look at his/her experiences with resentment and a desire to get even, or instead find peace about the matter and maybe even strive to reconcile with the perpetrator/s. Volf admits that the challenge is not just to remember wrongs endured and name them publicly the way individuals are so often encouraged, but to remember them rightly, in a way that heals wounded persons as well as their relationships with others, including their relationship with the perpetrators.

Moreover, forgiveness shapes one's relationship not only with others but also with every social environment in which one finds him/herself. Volf considers the relationship of his memory of abuse with the wider social setting out of which the abuse arose or to which it might be applied, because from the beginning, Volf did not see his experiences of interrogations simply as an isolated case of mistreatment. It was always a part of the whole. Volf claims that "each memory becomes a preparation for what is to come and a fitting contribution to the whole. To have segments of life containing significant experiences lost to memory and

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<sup>26</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 130.

<sup>27</sup>Bitancor to Volf.

<sup>28</sup>Miroslav Volf, "Redeeming Bitterness," interview by Collin Hansen. *Christianity Today*, May 18, 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/may/2.50.html>.

therefore not integrated into the whole of life is to sin against meaning and fail to heal what is broken.”<sup>29</sup> These memories will have to be integrated into a narrative, given significance as elements in a moral dilemma.<sup>30</sup> If certain memories are cut off from the larger story in which they are embedded and are employed in situations of conflict, persons might turn these memories into deadly weapons. But, if persons learn to respect the inner logic of these memories, which were shaped by the larger context in which they were situated and allow that logic to govern how they act in situations of conflict, these memories can become instruments of peace.<sup>31</sup>

If the perpetrators remember rightly, the memory of their wrongdoings will help restore their guilty past and transform it into the soil on which a more hopeful future can grow.<sup>32</sup> The potential misuse of memories generates hatred, breeds indifference, and leads to violence rather than justice.<sup>33</sup> If the remembering of wrongs suffered and committed is done rightly, the world of love, which is the Christian eschatological hope, will be realized. Volf admonishes that failure to see the meaning of bad memories “can hurl individuals deeper into irresolvable conflicts.”<sup>34</sup> However, if one succeeds in understanding and reflecting the deeper meaning of these memories, they are likely to become instruments of peace.”<sup>35</sup> Volf also admits that there is exactly no complete forgetting of memory but only the transformation of it. By way of forgetting or non-remembering, victims do not directly blot out haunting memories of their past. However, Volf ascertains that any individual is more likely to achieve a new version of the self and aid that new self to arrive in a state which is healed and restored from all the brokenness brought about by memories of abuse, suffering. For Volf, in order to completely assure one’s redemption of the past, he/she must learn to finally look beyond all the pain attached to such memory.

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<sup>29</sup>Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (United States of America: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 184.

<sup>30</sup>Volf, *The End of Memory*, 183.

<sup>31</sup>Volf, *The End of Memory*, 96.

<sup>32</sup>Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 98.

<sup>33</sup>Elie Wiesel, *The Accident*, trans. Anne Borchardt (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962).

<sup>34</sup>Miroslav Volf, “Memory of Reconciliation- Reconciliation of Memory,” in *The Catholic Theological Society of America* 59 (2004): 134.

<sup>35</sup>Volf, *The End of Memory*, 96.

*Forgiveness in the Metaphor of Embrace*

Volf's metaphor of embrace places people on a boundary between enmity and friendship, between exclusion and embrace.<sup>36</sup> This is a response to the call for reconciliation. Thus, Volf urges people to embrace their enemies as God has embraced humanity in Christ. Volf's metaphor of embrace seeks to centralize God's reception of hostile humanity into divine communion as a model for how human beings should relate to one another. The metaphor also seeks to combine the thought of reconciliation with the thought of dynamic and mutually conditioning identities.<sup>37</sup>

To begin with, Volf recognizes the dramatic episode of the Prodigal Son in the Scriptures (Lk. 15:11-32) which illustrates a beautiful imagery of embrace. Volf defines embrace as a step further into a reconciled existence. Embrace is opening oneself to another even if the other has injured him/her, inviting that other person in to an embrace. Volf's metaphor of embrace helps overcome hatred and indifference and seek healing for both the offended and the offender. It is an engagement with the other as one who has been created in God's image, as one for whom Christ has died, and as one who has been called and destined for the eternal glory of love. The father in Luke's narrative of the Prodigal Son is a paramount exemplar of embrace, in his forgiving the prodigal son and embracing his own new identity as father-of-the prodigal.<sup>38</sup>

Embrace is the antidote against *enmity*. It is a response to threatening personalities. As a metaphor, Volf sees embrace as suggesting that the self and the other belong together in mutual alterity. Volf asserts that the metaphor of embrace means to walk the road of mutual embrace that will let others live in communion with one another. This indeed will foster their flourishing relationship.<sup>39</sup> "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you" (Rom. 15:7). Volf also uses this biblical verse, as foundation for his metaphor of embrace which regulates social

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<sup>36</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 188.

<sup>37</sup>Miroslav Volf, "From Exclusion to Embrace," *Concilium* 2 (1992):102.

<sup>38</sup>Matthew Croasmun, "Christ and Human Flourishing An Introduction to the Thinking of Miroslav Volf Lecture" (Lecture Notes, University of Fribourg, May 13, 2015): Dr. Matthew Croasmun is the Director of Research and Publication, in Yale Center for Faith & Culture. To see a more detailed presentation of his said lecture, visit [https://faith.yale.edu/sites/default/files/christ\\_and\\_human\\_flourishing-volf-croasmun.pdf](https://faith.yale.edu/sites/default/files/christ_and_human_flourishing-volf-croasmun.pdf)

<sup>39</sup>Volf, "From Exclusion to Embrace," 95.

life, especially under conditions of enmity.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Volf also sees embrace as a remedy against the *phenomenon of exclusion*. Volf deepens the value of inclusion by elaborating exclusion. For Volf, humanity needs to press on with the program of inclusion, until the last pocket of exclusion has been conquered.<sup>41</sup> Volf then describes exclusion as a sickness, and inclusion an undiluted medicine.<sup>42</sup> The metaphor of embrace is an invitation of *creating a space to the other*. Volf's metaphor of embrace requires persons to refuse to fight back against the enemy's act of violence and rejection. Instead, Christians are to forgive and make space in themselves for the enemy to come in. In Christ's crucifixion, the crucified arms became the symbol of a space in God's self and an invitation for the enemy to come in.<sup>43</sup> Volf shows that there is always a need for persons to learn to acknowledge the "other" because the latter are the key to their moral wholeness. A person's moral deliverance lies not in his/her own hands, but in the hands of another, and ultimately, to be sure, in the hands of God.<sup>44</sup>

Reconciliation finds its correct significance in Volf's metaphor of embrace, for "reconciliation will not have taken place until one has moved toward one's former enemies and embrace them as belonging to the same communion of love."<sup>45</sup> Volf even postulates that the self is always a social self, and a wrongdoing intertwines the wrongdoer and the wronged as little else does. Reconciliation between human beings is intrinsic to their reconciliation to God.<sup>46</sup> Volf attests that reconciliation redefines relationships.<sup>47</sup> He emphasizes that reconciliation, as a central theological concept, has an inalienable social dimension,<sup>48</sup> and Christians are called to become its social agents who are held responsible for a transition from a world of sin to the world of perfect love.<sup>49</sup> Volf urges

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<sup>40</sup>Volf, "From Exclusion to Embrace," 102.

<sup>41</sup>Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 39.

<sup>42</sup>Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 40.

<sup>43</sup>Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 94.

<sup>44</sup>Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (United States of America: University of Notre Dame Press 1989), 148.

<sup>45</sup>Robert Boak Slocum, *A Heart for the Future: Writings on the Christian Hope* (WIPF and Stock Publishers Eugene, Oregon, 2000), 260.

<sup>46</sup>Miroslav Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 54, no. 2 (2000), 166.

<sup>47</sup>Volf, *The End of Memory*, 205.

<sup>48</sup>Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," 163.

<sup>49</sup>Volf, "The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition." *Modern Theology* 16, no. 1(2000), 108.

Christians to become its social agents, since they are the presumed agents of peace, "at best impotent in the face of people's conflicts and at worst perpetrators of the most heinous crime."<sup>50</sup> Volf claims that, reconciliation is a social responsibility of Christians,<sup>51</sup> and that it is a Christian social engagement.<sup>52</sup> He also adds that reconciliation becomes a way of enabling men to live together in a meaningful community.<sup>53</sup>

### **Eschatological Glimpse of Social Reconciliation**

Volf presents three ways to describe the Last Judgment in anticipation to the social reconciliation bound to happen in the future. First, he says that the Last Judgment is a judgment of grace, for it is a judgment executed by the same Christ who died for the world's salvation. Second, the Last Judgment is a social event; it happens not simply to individuals but between people. Human beings are linked by many ties to neighbours near and far, both in space and in time. Third, if the Last Judgment, understood as social event, is to succeed as a transition to the world of love, each person will joyfully appropriate the results of the judgment.<sup>54</sup> Volf recounts for the reconciliatory transition that is expected to transpire in the final eschaton. For Volf, that the Last Judgement is the turning point of embrace between persons who were formerly at odds with one another.<sup>55</sup> Volf explains that as a judgement of grace, the judgement day leads humanity to be transformed and be fully reconciled with God and one another. That's how it must be. Otherwise judgement could not be with what faith claims it is- the door to the world of love.<sup>56</sup> Volf postulates that the Last Judgement is a point where "in standing before Christ, the wronged and wrongdoers will see themselves and each other as does Christ, the just Judge who is full of mercy. They will see each other and their own selves with the eyes of Christ, for union with Christ begun in this life will be completed at the threshold of the world to come, in which each enjoys all and therefore all take part in the dance of love."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," 159.

<sup>51</sup>Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," 160.

<sup>52</sup>Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," 166.

<sup>53</sup>Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," 161.

<sup>54</sup>Volf, *The End of Memory*, 179- 180.

<sup>55</sup>Volf, "The Final Reconciliation", 102-5.

<sup>56</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 220.

<sup>57</sup>Volf, "The Final Reconciliation," 103.

### **Volf's Theology of Forgiveness at the Service of the Kingdom**

The value Volf's theology of forgiveness is measured by three main concepts namely generosity, memory and inclusivity. Thus, Volf makes a general statement about his theology of forgiveness; his rejoinder is that "forgiveness is a part of the larger process of reconciliation. And reconciliation part of larger vision of the true, good, and flourishing life, or, theology of the 'Kingdom' or 'home' of God." The point is clear, Volf's theology of forgiveness seeks to understand the person of God in the human praxis of giving, remembering and embracing in realization of His Kingdom. Volf's theology of forgiveness then becomes an active opposition to the Kingdom of Satan, where division, oppression and rupture exist. It is this opposition that brought Jesus Christ to the cross; and it is this opposition that gave meaning to His nonviolence. It takes the struggle against deception and oppression to transform nonviolence from barren negativity into creative possibility, from a quicksand into the foundation of a new world.<sup>58</sup> Volf's theology of forgiveness is a proclamation to the Kingdom of God. In the employment of its threefold model, Volf yearns to generate social participants who are shaped by the values of God's Kingdom and are capable of participating in the project of authentic social transformation.<sup>59</sup> Hence, Volf's theology of forgiveness is witnessing so that God's desire for salvation is known and celebrated. The threefold model of forgiveness becomes a significant asset in the finalization of the Kingdom.

### **Church's Teaching on Social Dimension of Salvation**

In the development of the Church's teaching on the social dimension of salvation, this section introduces the importance of salvation in the light of the human condition under the governance of God. Moreover, the nature of sin and its social implications are tackled to enrich the context for salvation amidst a sinful humanity. Related themes such as the Church, sacraments, grace and reconciliation are also embedded to buttress the understanding of the corporate view of salvation. In terse, the most essential point of this section is the argument on salvation as a social task for which everyone is responsible.

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<sup>58</sup>Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 228.

<sup>59</sup>Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 87.



### Salvation as Human and Divine Priority

Salvation remains as the one greatest gift God has given to mankind. Humans are not to ignore or despise it, but to toil for it. Without salvation, man will neither have future nor hope (Rom. 8:13). But with it, man is given the opportunity to become a new person: a person who comes to contentment, happiness and peace in his life. The seminal importance of salvation arises from the need of human beings to be delivered from a perilous situation of death or eternal damnation. Considering the consequences of sin and human limitations, every person is to take salvation as his or her priority. Thus, Jesus counsels, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33). Bigger than the human concern, salvation is first and foremost a priority of God. The first Canon in the Council of Trent explicates the need for God in the experience of salvation, otherwise "if anyone says that man can be justified before God by his own works, whether done by his own natural powers or through the teaching of the law without divine grace through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema."<sup>61</sup> However, as much as salvation is a human priority, it can never be devoid from the concept of God. It depends on God's own purpose, kindness and grace and not on human works (2 Tim. 1:9; Tit 3:4-7). The constitutive work of redemption is from first to last, God's own. The realization of salvation, namely its conception and the means used, also occurs in strict consequence of divine initiative.<sup>60</sup> It is by His grace that salvation comes into fulfilment and completion. Salvation is not fulfilled by human effort alone. The Catechism of the Catholic Church confers that "man stands in need of salvation from God. One's own human effort can never be adequate and sufficient to secure his/her salvation. Divine help comes to man in Christ through the law that guides him and the grace that sustains him."<sup>61</sup> To ask about salvation is to ask about the character of the One Who saves. Only a particular God is the Author, the Agent and the Perfecter of the salvation which humankind knows through the testimony of Holy Scripture.<sup>62</sup> God's motivations for saving humanity can be understood in three perspectives as explained by J. Hampton Keathley III. First, salvation *brings glory to God*. It is in the act of salvation that man witnesses how glorious and splendid the Father is towards His erring children. Seconds, salvation through the

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<sup>60</sup>Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae, ed. *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective* (Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 2.

<sup>61</sup>CCC, 1949.

<sup>62</sup>Davidson and Murray, ed. *God of Salvation*, 122.

Person and work of Christ is also a *manifestation of God's grace*. Third, salvation is motivated by *God's desire to mend division* between Him and His creatures. Most importantly, the Catholic Church sustains that above all reasons mentioned, it was primarily due to God's love for humankind that shaped His desire for their salvation. By giving up his own Son for the sins of man, God manifests that His plan is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on man's part.<sup>63</sup> Salvation declares how loving God is by sending His only begotten Son. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10; 4:19). Thus, St. Thérèse of Lisieux articulates:

If the Church was a body composed of different members, it couldn't lack the noblest of all; it must have a Heart, and a heart burning with love. And I realized that *this love alone was the true motive force* which enabled the other members of the Church to act; if it ceased to function, the Apostles would forget to preach the gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others; it's a universe of its own, comprising all time and space - it's eternal!<sup>64</sup>

However, in response to the call of salvation, God leaves man the task to either express their desire for it in faith and in deed. The Church teaches that *faith is the beginning of eternal life*. It is faith that makes man tastes in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of his journey here below. Then man shall see God "face to face", "as He is" (1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Jn. 3: 2).<sup>65</sup> Good works are also necessary for justification. The Council of Trent on the Decree Concerning Justification affirms this by declaring that for "those who work well unto the end (Mt. 10: 22) and trust in God, eternal life is to be offered, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, and as a reward promised by God Himself, to be faithfully given according to their good works and merits (Rom. 6: 22)."<sup>66</sup> St. Clement pleaded to the Corinthians to persevere in doing good vis-a-vis a moral life, for in such a manner will they receive the reward of eternal salvation. Thus, nobody's

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<sup>63</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Manila: World and Life Publications, 1994), 604.

<sup>64</sup>*St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Autobiography of a Saint*, trans. Ronald Knox (London: Harvill, 1958), 235.

<sup>65</sup>CCC, 163.

<sup>66</sup>*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 41.

holy deeds, when taken apart from faith, will assure him salvation.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, the Council of Trent on the Decree concerning justification pronounces that reception of grace is ever more increased through the observance of the commandments of God, *faith cooperating with good works*.<sup>68</sup> The Church Fathers keep a consistent position in the treatment of salvation and identify two important components for its acquisition. Though salvation is purely initiated by God, still man has to do his part to receive it. Salvation is given on the basis of man's own faith which should result in doing "good works". Thus, good works always flow from Christian faith. At the end, salvation is never been either, or between, faith and good works. It has always been both.

The God who creates is at the same time, the God who saves. The notion of creation theologically commences with the understanding of salvation. The two are inextricably intertwined, considering that the story of salvation actually begins and ends with creation. Christian teaching about God's salvation is intimately associated with Christian teaching about creation. Get one wrong, and the other will certainly be wrong too. Conversely, understanding either one aright will cast light on the other.<sup>69</sup> The universe in which human beings live has its source in God Who created it. Certainly, the whole world came into existence by the power of God's creative Word. Creation was brought about not by one god among many, but by the One True God Himself Who is the source of all that exists. There is indeed an indivisible unity between God as Creator and God as Redeemer, because creation can never be bereft from salvation. Redemption is dependent on the existence of a created universe with rational creatures forming part of it.<sup>70</sup> Salvation history makes no sense if there is no so-called proper creation, that is, a creation of all, or the Universe out of nothing.<sup>71</sup> Through Christ's incarnation, salvation was actualized, adducing new hope to every single creation blemished with sin. Thus, the experience of God as triune, as Creator,

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<sup>67</sup>Chris Erickson, "Salvation from the Perspective of the Early Church Fathers," March 16, 2010, <https://chnetwork.org/2010/03/16/salvation-from-the-perspective-of-the-early-church-fathers/> (accessed May 25, 2018).

<sup>68</sup>*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 36.

<sup>69</sup>Jon Garvey, "The Relationship of Creation to Salvation," *The Hump of the Camel*, July 13 2014, from <http://potiphar.jongarvey.co.uk/2014/07/13/the-relationship-of-creation-to-salvation/> (accessed April 14, 2019).

<sup>70</sup>Paul Haffner, *Mystery of Creation*, (Gracewing: Cromwell Press, 1995), 139.

<sup>71</sup>Haffner, *Mystery of Creation*, 140.

Redeemer, and Inspiration, suggests that the doctrines of creation and redemption really belong together.<sup>72</sup> God Who created all things is the same God who is also capable of healing, justifying and saving it. Thus, the idea of creation is always in touch and in sync with the idea of salvation. Creation is the foundation of all God's saving plans, and where the history of salvation begins."<sup>73</sup>

### Social Extension of Individual Sins

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith describes "sin as an experience of alienation from God Who is the fount of communion and life, bringing about the loss of harmony among human beings, and between humanity. Since by sinning man refuses to submit himself to God, his internal balance is destroyed and it is precisely within himself that contradictions and conflicts arise. Wounded in this way, man almost inevitably causes damage to the fabric of his relationship with others and with the created world."<sup>74</sup>and the world, initiating the dominion of disintegration and death (Rom. 5:12).<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, sin is not rooted in pessimism about human nature, but rather in the optimism, or better yet, the hope that Christians have in Christ's universal redemptive power.<sup>76</sup> Because of sin, salvation came to be. Otherwise, what purpose would God hold onto for the task of salvation if not for the sins which human persons have committed?

Every sin, though individually committed, always generates a social impact. On matters of its repercussions, sin can extend far beyond the case of the individual and can reach members of the community.

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<sup>72</sup>Clive W Ayre, "Eco-Salvation: The Redemption of All Creation." *Thesis Abstract: An Approach to Eco-Salvation* 7-8, <https://ucaqld.com.au/wpcontent/uploads/2013/04/EcoSalvcreation.pdf> (accessed January 13, 2019).

<sup>73</sup>CCC, 280.

<sup>74</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, (2 December 1984), §14, at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp\\_ii\\_exh\\_02121984\\_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp_ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html)

<sup>75</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Certain Aspects of Christian Salvation, *Placuit Deo* (January 3, 2018) § 7, at the Holy See, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/03/01/180301a.html>

<sup>76</sup>Frederick C Bauerschmidt and James J. Buckley, *Catholic Theology: An Introduction*, Wiley Blackwell (Singapore: COS. Printers Pte Ltd., 2017), 103.

Inevitably, the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church teaches that “sin wounds not only man’s nature but also injures human solidarity.”<sup>77</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church maintains that though sin is a personal act, everyone still has the responsibility for the sins committed by others, especially when they cooperate in them.<sup>78</sup> Pope John Paul, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, teaches that sins, though committed privately by oneself, will always produce social consequences, affecting others palpably or discreetly. Since most sins are socially harmful, the sins committed against justice due in relations between individuals between the community and the individual are also social.<sup>79</sup>

Sin is like a genetic disease and works its way into human persons’ biology and brains, and the structures of society. To consistently commit sin is like being addicted to the drug heroin. As sin becomes part of one’s personal system, it becomes hard for a person to will himself out of it. Sin is more than just bad habits. It has made human beings a big dysfunctional family. Sin is a disease that has affected the whole human family.<sup>80</sup> Thus, sin injured human solidarity. Every man, therefore, is obliged to restore the relational solidarity broken and torn apart by sin by finding ways of saving each other. The background of the social dimension of salvation is the social phenomenon of sin. Like a genetic disease, the consequences of sin perpetuate to corresponding social structures, thus are capable of creating an ever increasing effect on individual persons.

Likely, sin and salvation are correlatives. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6: 23). The reality of salvation is never divorced from the reality of sin, taking note that the relation between the cure and the disease has often been a reciprocal one.<sup>81</sup> The idea of being saved rests on the very reason of one committing sin, as depicted by the action of the Father in sending

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<sup>77</sup>CCC, 1872.

<sup>78</sup>CCC, 1868.

<sup>79</sup>*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, §16.

<sup>80</sup>“What is Salvation, Justification and Merit?” *St. Mark Study Guide* March 22, 2017, <https://d2wldr9tsuuj1b.cloudfront.net/15121/documents/2017/2/March%2022%20Salvation%20justification%20and%20merit-1.pdf> (accessed January 13, 2019).

<sup>81</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 143.

His only begotten Son to save the world ridden by human transgressions. Christian doctrine teaches that men are all sinners, whatever might be the source of that sin. Thus, they are all in need of a Savior for they cannot save themselves.<sup>82</sup> The experience of sin is rooted in the hope of receiving the gift of salvation through Christ. Because fallen man cannot redeem himself, so God endowed humanity with the merit of salvation. Thus, as sin carries out a social dimension, so does salvation. For “...where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Gal. 5: 21).

### Redemption Through Christ

*Redemptoris Missio* declares that salvation in Christ is offered to all and “must be made concretely available to all.”<sup>83</sup> Man was never created to subdue the world alone. Instead, he is to work hand in hand with his fellowmen. The author of the salvific plan is God the Father Himself.<sup>84</sup> God wills that all men be saved. Even if not all men are saved, people must not on that account depreciate in any way the most omnipotent will of God; rather, they must understand the words “who will have all men to be saved” to mean that no man is saved unless God wills him to be saved, and not that there is no man whom He does not will to save, but that not one is saved unless He wills it. He has in mind the reconciliation and unity of His children. Basically, the divine plan is not centralized on the salvation of an individual alone, but of the whole human community. As the self is relational, so is the divine plan of God Who is always in communication with others. Concurring, *Gaudium et Spes* states that “God who has fatherly concern for everyone has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself.”<sup>85</sup> As St. Paul pronounces in his second letter to the Corinthians: “Christ died

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<sup>82</sup>Wilson, *A Primer for Christian Doctrine*, 91.

<sup>83</sup>John Paul II, Encyclical Letter On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio*, (7 December 1990) §10, at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html)

<sup>84</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmayer, “Pauline Theology,” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed Raymond E Brown et al. (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1993), 808.

<sup>85</sup>Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, § 24 (December 7, 1965) in Documents of Vatican Council II. Edited by James H Kroeger. Philippines: Paulines Publishing House, 2011.

for all" (5:15). God concretized this saving act in the person of Christ. When man fell into sin, a wide rift between the human race and God was created. It was necessary that a Mediator, Who alone was born, lived and was put to death without sin, should reconcile men with God even to the extent of obtaining for them the resurrection of the body unto life everlasting. God had a reason for sending His Son to earth in human flesh and that is to redeem humanity from the punishment of sin. Tarsicius J. van Bavel, who is a scholar in the thoughts of St. Augustine, says, "Christ is central point of this whole redemptive work, the principle of unity and its true realization. In Him, God gave everything a new Head who unites all things."<sup>86</sup> Jesus is the only Savior of the human being and of all humanity.<sup>87</sup> God's humanity, united with the Person of the Word, was the instrument of man's salvation. Therefore, in Christ the perfect achievement of man's reconciliation with his Creator came forth, and the fullness of divine worship was given to humanity.<sup>88</sup> Christ indeed plays an indispensable and necessary role for human salvation. By His incarnate nature, He redeems man's fallen nature in all its associations. Christ is acknowledged as the one Savior for all people. The Paschal mystery of Christ marks the history of salvation. By the passion, death and resurrection of the Son, God's saving plan was accomplished once for all. Jesus' violent death was not the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but is part of the mystery of God's plan.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the entrance of Jesus Christ into the history of the world reaches its culmination in the Paschal Mystery, where nature itself takes part in the drama of the rejection of the Son of God and the victory of his Resurrection (Mt. 27: 45, 51, 28: 2).<sup>90</sup> Crossing through death and grafting into it the new splendor of the resurrection, Jesus inaugurates a new world in which everything is subjected to him (1 Cor. 15: 20-28) and he creates anew those relationships of order and harmony that sin had destroyed.<sup>91</sup> It is only through the resurrection of Christ that the believer

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<sup>86</sup>Tarsicius J. van Bavel, *Christians in the World: Introduction to the Spirituality of Augustine*, ed., John E. Rotelle, OSA, (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1980). 81.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. Acts 4:12; Rom 3:23-24; 1 Tm 2:4-5; Tit 2:11-15.

<sup>88</sup>*Sacramentarium Veronese* (ed. Mohlberg), n. 1265; cf. also n. 1241, 1248.

<sup>89</sup>CCC, 599.

<sup>90</sup>Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Philippines: Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. Word and Life Publications, 2004), § 454.

<sup>91</sup>*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 454.

has a justified hope for eternal life, because the resurrection has made it possible to undo death and the resulting separation between mankind and God which was caused by Adam's fall into sin (1 Cor. 15: 21-22). The Paschal Mystery of Christ is a core doctrine of the Catholic Church and one of the essential beliefs of all Christians. To describe it, one can say that Paschal Mystery is the process through which the work of Christ is able to redeem humanity from death and from eternal separation from God. In a more positive note, the Paschal Mystery is the process through which Christ's passion, death and resurrection make everlasting life possible for all people and brings them into full and eternal union with the Holy Trinity. It was through Christ's passion, death and resurrection that the fullness of salvation was realized and attained.

### **Church and Sacraments at the Service of Salvation**

Recent documents of the Church authenticate the role of the Church in salvation. The Social Doctrine of the Church depicts that "the Church places herself concretely at the service of the Kingdom of God above all by announcing and communicating the Gospel of salvation and by establishing new Christian communities."<sup>92</sup> The Church offers herself as a place of communion, witness and mission, and the catalyst for the redemption and transformation of social relationships."<sup>93</sup> The Church as a sacrament continues the saving action of God since the Church is the instrument of the saving grace that comes through Christ. The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes Divinitus* says that the Church "having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity, and obeying the mandate of her Founder (Mk. 16: 16), strives to preach the Gospel to all men."<sup>94</sup> In *Lumen Gentium*, the Church is taught as a sacrament and an instrument of salvation. Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, so the Church is called to follow the same route that it might communicate the fruits of salvation to men."<sup>95</sup> The Catechism of the

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<sup>92</sup>*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 50.

<sup>93</sup>*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 52.

<sup>94</sup>Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*, § 1 (7 December 1965) in Documents of Vatican Council II. Edited by James H Kroeger (Philippines: Paulines Publishing House, 2011), 655.

<sup>95</sup>Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, § 8 (November 18 1965) in Documents of Vatican Council II. Edited by James H Kroeger. Philippines: Paulines Publishing House, 2011.



Catholic Church points out that the Church accompanies the people in the realization of their salvation. She “offers an original and irreplaceable contribution with the concern that impels her to make the family of mankind and its history more human, prompting her to place herself as a bulwark against every totalitarian temptation, as she shows man his integral and definitive vocation.”<sup>96</sup>

Today, the experience of reconciliation continues to live on in the Church. St. Augustine in his sermon *On Pastors* lectures that men, upon being in love with earthly things are like strayed sheep scattered over the entire face of the earth. “They dwell in different places, but one mother has given birth to them all, just as one mother, the Catholic Church, has given birth to all faithful Christians scattered over the whole world.”<sup>97</sup> She proclaims the message of reconciliation as she has always done throughout her history, from the apostolic Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:2-33) down to the latest synod and the recent jubilee of the redemption.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the Church is reconciling inasmuch as she shows man the paths that leads to the conversion of heart and victory over sin. Precisely the Church offers the means for reaching reconciliation through the sacraments which are true signs and instruments of reconciliation, “among which there excels, precisely under this aspect, the one which men are rightly accustomed to call the sacrament of reconciliation or penance.”<sup>99</sup> The whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that Christ acquired from men at the price of his blood. Thus, as the Catholic Church opens the path to universal reconciliation, she also leads the way to universal salvation.

The Catholic Church assures that salvation, by means of forgiveness, is obtained through the reception of her sacraments. Essentially, sacraments are outwards signs instituted by Christ to confer grace. The sacraments signify the graces they give. Each sacrament possesses the power from God to make the soul of the recipient holy and pleasing. Precisely, it is in the sacraments, that persons are able to avail their salvation. Sinners are forgiven on account of their salvation

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<sup>96</sup>CCC, 2244.

<sup>97</sup>“From a sermon *On Pastors* by Saint Augustine,” contained in one of the readings of *The Liturgy of the Hours: Ordinary Time Weeks 18-34*, trans. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 1975), 294.

<sup>98</sup>*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, § 8.

<sup>99</sup>*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, § 9.

through the sacraments, a structured reality which is at once an “outward sign of inward grace.” The Church herself is a reconciling community, in whose sacraments such as baptism and penance, sinners are forgiven, led back to God and obtain salvation. For instance is the sacrament of baptism. The Church teaches that “those who have been reborn in the sacrament of baptism will have nothing to remain that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam’s sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God.”<sup>100</sup> By the forgiving sins, baptism contributes to the economy of salvation. The Catholic Church declares that baptism is necessary for salvation and even the Lord affirms to this as he says: “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (Jn. 3:5). Also contributing to God’s favor of salvation toward man is the Sacrament of Penance, whereby sinners are being lead to repentance and conversion. The sacrament of Penance allows man to discover the greatness of God’s love that man’s heart is shaken by the horror and weight of his sin and begins to fear offending God again. Thus, in the sacrament of penance, the human heart is aided toward its conversion.<sup>101</sup> The sacrament of penance gives Christians the ability to make a fresh start, to regain and dedication and purity of their baptism.<sup>102</sup> Here, is an obvious implication that reconciliation repeats part of the function of baptism. In broad strokes, since they commemorate and renew Christ’s paschal mystery, the Catholic Church acclaims all the sacraments as source of life for the Church herself and in the Church’s hands they become means of conversion to God and of reconciliation among people.<sup>103</sup> “With the grace of the seven sacraments of the Church, believers continually grow and are spiritually renewed.”<sup>104</sup>

The soteriological significance of the sacrament of penance is identified on account of the sacrament’s influence to man’s final end. Doing penance for one’s sins is a first step towards obtaining forgiveness and winning eternal salvation. That is the clear and explicit teaching of Christ, and no one can fail to see how justified and how right the Catholic

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<sup>100</sup>CCC, 1263.

<sup>101</sup>CCC, 1432.

<sup>102</sup> David M. Coffey, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, (United States: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 57.

<sup>103</sup>*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, § 11.

<sup>104</sup>*Placuit Deo*, § 13.

Church has always been in constantly insisting on this.<sup>105</sup> Jesus inaugurated His saving mission not by revealing the principal truths of the faith, but by insisting that the soul must repent of every trace of sin that could render it impervious to the message of eternal salvation:<sup>106</sup> “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4.17). The sacrament of penance imparts to the sinner the life of God who reconciles and makes sacramentally present the call of Jesus to conversion.<sup>107</sup> It is in the sacrament of penance that God gives man the strength to begin life anew and enter into conversion. Conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, “clasping sinners to her bosom, is at once holy and always in need of purification, and follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.”<sup>108</sup> The sacrament of penance is a return to the Lord that is to return to communion with Him after having lost it through sin. The sacrament of penance is also likened to a rescue operation, by which God frees man from loneliness, isolation, weakness, ignorance and fear – from the radical sinfulness which lies behind particular sins and is reinforced by the cumulative effects of sins. God saves the sinner from himself and restores him to the Church, where in an atmosphere of security, acceptance and love man can grow to the full stature of Christ.<sup>109</sup> The sacrament of penance helps accomplish the mission of Christ in forgiving sins and perpetuating salvation to the whole world.

Generally, the sacraments confer grace which is important in obtaining salvation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines grace as the “participation in the life of God.”<sup>110</sup> Grace is absolutely necessary for salvation. A more rigid claim on God’s grace would be that God saved humanity and called each one to live a life of holiness, not because of anything they humanity had done, but according to His own design and by His own grace. The grace of God in itself does possess a social dimension as it takes effect not only exclusively to the baptized members

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<sup>105</sup>John XXIII, Encyclical on the Need for the Practice of Interior and Exterior Penance, *Paenitentiam Agere* (July 1, 1962), § 1, at The Holy See, [http://W2.Vatican.Va/Content/John-Xxiii/En/Encyclicals/Documents/Hf\\_J-Xxiii\\_Enc\\_01071962\\_Paenitentiam.Html](http://W2.Vatican.Va/Content/John-Xxiii/En/Encyclicals/Documents/Hf_J-Xxiii_Enc_01071962_Paenitentiam.Html)

<sup>106</sup>*Paenitentiam Agere*, § 8.

<sup>107</sup>CCC, 1423-24.

<sup>108</sup>*Lumen Gentium*, § 3.

<sup>109</sup>Francis J. Buckley, *I confess” The Sacrament of Penance Today* (United States of America: Ave Maria Press, 1972), 16-7.

<sup>110</sup>CCC, 1997.

of the Catholic Church but also to the non-Christians as well. German Theologian, Karl Rahner is known for his theory of salvation which deals with the possibility of man achieving salvation because of man's response to God's self-communication. Rahner argues that grace always permeates every aspect of human existence; it always surrounds men. Grace is the inescapable setting of human existence.<sup>111</sup> Rahner argues that Christians should consider non-Christian as anonymous Christians because of their implicit acceptance of God's grace.<sup>112</sup> He adds that anonymous Christians have a relationship with the Church and that they belong to the Church in a "looser" way because of grace.<sup>113</sup> Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* points out how God's grace accommodates people in their way to salvation. He acknowledges this since in the past and even today, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church. However, through grace, even the non-baptized Christians can avail of salvation. The social and cultural conditions in which non-baptized Christians live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions.<sup>114</sup> The grace of God is boundless. It has an all-embracing effect on Christians or non-Christians alike. Grace is what restores what the fall has damaged in nature.<sup>115</sup> Grace not only empowers man to live aright in choosing and doing good but also allows man to avoid evil. Grace gives man the power of perseverance, in spite of his fallen nature. Furthermore, the Catechism of the Catholic Church treats grace as first and foremost, the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. Grace also enables human beings to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church.<sup>116</sup> The grace of God is at work everywhere. Grace

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<sup>111</sup>Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace," *Theological Investigations* 18 (London: Darroton, Longman & Todd, 1983), 181.

<sup>112</sup>Karl Rahner, "The New Image of the Church" in *Theological Investigations* vol. X: *Writings of 1965-67*, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Crossroads, 1972-1973), 20-21.

<sup>113</sup>Karl Rahner, "Membership of the Church according to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical 'Mystici Corporis Christi,'" in *Theological Investigation vol. II: Man in the Church*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 23.

<sup>114</sup>John Paul II, Encyclical Letter On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio*, (7 December 1990) §10, at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html)

<sup>115</sup>Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1991), 113.

<sup>116</sup>CCC, 2003.

is therefore summarized as the sum total of God's free gifts that makes man's salvation possible.

### **Man's Social Responsibility towards Salvation**

Pope John Paul in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* relays that "man is called to have the firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the good of all and of each individual *because all is really responsible for all*."<sup>117</sup> Every man should earnestly desire the salvation of others besides himself. Every man is obliged to restore the relational solidarity broken and torn apart by sin by finding ways of saving each other. The edification of the social dimension of salvation comes to realization when man starts to hold on to good intentions done through naturally good works for the sake of saving others from evil, error, sickness or death. Such assertion can be attributed to the exercise of the *seven corporal and spiritual works of mercy*. Salvation is a social event that everyone should participate into. Thus, "*every man is called to be saved and to save*."<sup>118</sup> *Redemptoris Missio* attests to this by articulating that "the kingdom of God is meant for all mankind, and all people are called to become members of it."<sup>119</sup> Salvation is a social responsibility. Salvation is what each man should grant to another. "Just as Christ was sent by the Father, so also He sent the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit. This He did that, by preaching the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15.) they might proclaim that the Son of God, by His death and resurrection, had freed men from the power of Satan (Acts 26:18.) and from death, and brought them into the Kingdom of the Father.

The salvation offered in its fullness to men in Jesus Christ by God the Father's initiative, and brought about and transmitted by the work of the Holy Spirit, is the salvation of the whole person, and for all people. It is a universal and integral salvation. It concerns the human person in all his dimensions:

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<sup>117</sup>John Paul II, Encyclical Letter for the Twentieth Anniversary of Populorum Progressio, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, § 38 (30 December 1987), at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html)

<sup>118</sup>Ronald Lawler, et al. ed., *The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults, Second Edition*, (United States of America: Our Sunday Visitor Inc., 1983), 526.

<sup>119</sup>*Redemptoris Missio*, § 14.

personal and social, spiritual and corporeal, historical and transcendent.<sup>120</sup>

Jesus Christ redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men.<sup>121</sup> As part of His Divine plan, salvation will come as a social event that upholds the rightful place of human beings in heaven not as separated, unrelated individuals, but as a unified and incorporated community. The social dimension of salvation is a fulfilment of God's will to reconcile men to Himself, as they are being reconciled to one another. The individual exists only through the other. The individual is not solitary.<sup>122</sup> To help affirm this, the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church asserts that every individual is a communal being. Man lives within a community. Even the most "self-made" individual has been influenced significantly by others: he has had a father, and a mother; he has had a teacher, he has had a culture with practices, institutions and traditions. Because an individual is such a communal being, he finds meaning in the community, a community that can be a family whose needs men seek to meet, a corporation for whose success men work, an ecclesial community to whose mission men want to contribute, a civic community whose vibrancy men strive to sustain, or even a world community.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore since sins are always social, salvation should also be social. As the human community is inflicted by the whirlpool of sin, Christ was sent to deliver not just an exclusive part of the human community but the whole of it. The same calling is given to all people. The social dimension of salvation is fundamentally founded on the responsibility of each person to transmit to others the salvation he or she has received from God through Christ. If individual sins make a rippling effect in the society, so should salvation. God willed all men to look after one another and work together to maintain the common good. The social dimension of salvation postulates that every man is capable of participating to the salvation of the other and can be appointed by God, just like the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Judges, and the Apostles, to function as His participants in carrying out His goal of liberating His beloved humanity from the slavery of sin. As God's address to Paul and Barnabas: "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made

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<sup>120</sup>*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 38.

<sup>121</sup>*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §52.

<sup>122</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, (Fortress Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>123</sup>*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 33.

you a light for the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:47).””The social dimension of salvation is anchored on God’s intention to deliver all of humanity from the slavery of sin. More importantly, it upholds the social responsibility of every person towards one another. People ought to carry on the saving attitude of the Savior Who was sent to proclaim the Kingdom of God and lead everyone to eternal life. In line with this *Gaudete et Exsultate* confers that “persons are never completely themselves unless they belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws everyone to Himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in a human community.”<sup>124</sup>

Christ is the sole agent of salvation. However, in adherence to the Church’s teaching on man’s responsibility to his brethren as key factor for his progress and fulfilment, it can be said that Christ’s mission of salvation was not totally concluded the moment he died, because it was passed on to his apostles, to their disciples and now, to Christians in the whole world. The conquest for salvation is not a mere individual task. It is a mission to be carried out by every person in cooperation with one another. God does not want an individualistic redemption of the self. He yearns to see His children be saved without anybody getting left behind, because Christ made all things one in Himself: heaven and earth, God and man, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society.<sup>125</sup> Thus, through Christ, God delegates the rest of human beings to be His subordinates and fellow-workers in the work of salvation, bequeathing them with talents, qualities, skills, and roles that allow them to contribute as perfect instruments of that same divine love which desires the salvation of all people. God does not restrict the agency of salvation to Himself. By sending Christ, God provided human beings a Savior to deliver them from the slavery of sin. The entire life of Christ was a free offering to the Father to carry out His plan of salvation. “He gave His life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45) and in this way He reconciled all of humanity with God. The divine mission of salvation has been entrusted by Christ to the apostles, which was again passed on to their disciples down to their successors. This is done not only so that the apostles could have helpers in their ministry but also, in order that “the mission assigned to them might continue after their death, they passed on to their immediate

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<sup>124</sup>*Gaudete et Exsultate*, § 6.

<sup>125</sup>*Evangelii Gaudium*, § 229.

cooperators, as it were, in the form of a testament, the duty of confirming and finishing the work begun by themselves.”<sup>126</sup>

Man is not a solitary being, but a social being and unless he relates himself to others he can never live or develop his potential. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.<sup>127</sup> Men are designed to live communally with others. God Himself claimed that “*it is not good that man be alone*” (Gen. 2: 18). So He created more than one human being, with all others being decedents of the first human. Since men, therefore, were created to live together, they too should remain together as they ascend to heaven. Thus, men are responsible for the acts of each other. “For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning ... I will require it...of man and of every man’s brother” (Gen. 9: 5). Pope Francis claims that “people begin to enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens, not as a mob swayed by the powers that be.”<sup>128</sup> Henceforth, “every Christian is laid the preeminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world.”<sup>129</sup> Each man is a member of society; hence he belongs to the community of man. It is not just certain individuals but all men who are called to further the development of human society as a whole.<sup>130</sup> Man’s social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another. Through his dealings with others, through reciprocal duties, and through fraternal dialogue he develops all his gifts and is able to rise to his destiny.<sup>131</sup> Hence, a human being is not meant to be an isolated individual, but is destined to come to fulfillment in society and at the same time to contribute to society’s welfare. This is true at all levels, including and especially the spiritual. Human beings do not encounter God only as individual persons, though they do encounter him that way,

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<sup>126</sup>*Lumen Gentium*, § 28.

<sup>127</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, § 12.

<sup>128</sup>*Evangelii Gaudium*, § 220

<sup>129</sup>Paul VI, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (November 18, 1965) § 3, at the Holy See, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)

<sup>130</sup>Paul VI, Encyclical Letter on the Development of Peoples, *Populorum Progressio*, § 17. (26 March 1967), at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html)

<sup>131</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, § 25.



and it is an indispensable way of encountering Him. However, they also encounter him as members of the human family.<sup>132</sup>

### **Volf's Pastoral Model of Forgiveness for Actualizing Social Dimension of Salvation**

#### **Unforgiving Culture of Humankind: A Pastoral Dilemma**

Unforgiveness is a human reality. Even when faced with minor slights, persons easily keep grudges. When they do, they reluctantly refuse to soften their anger and may even plot revenge. They find it difficult to resist being pulled into the vortex of conflict. Oftentimes, when conflicts arise, they become eager combatants who seek the destruction of their enemies as their main object.<sup>133</sup> For Volf, human beings live in a sentimental yet unforgiving culture, a culture in which forgiveness does not make sense. Volf assumes that if only men could, they would surely sue God, for having created a world in which bad things happen. Instead of forgiving and restoring relationships, litigants seek to punish and to extract maximal compensation. More than just insisting on their rights, men see to maximize their profits at the other's expense. Far from being concerned with justice, they are often driven by vengeance and greed.<sup>134</sup> Unforgiveness does not bear good fruits, as Pope Francis explicates:

When conflict arises, others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But, conflicts are not to be ignored or concealed, nor are they allowed to shape men's identity and relationships. Conflicts are to be faced. For if men remain trapped in an unforgiving culture, governed by conflicts, they will certainly lose their perspective, their horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart.<sup>135</sup>

Unforgiveness results from a fall from grace which inevitably involves persons in sinful circumstances. Hence, failure to forgive becomes a sin. So whenever a person wrongs another, it becomes a Christian obligation for the offended to forgive him/her. Otherwise,

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<sup>132</sup>Coffey, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, 76.

<sup>133</sup>Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology 54, no. 2 (2000), 161.

<sup>134</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 125.

<sup>135</sup>*Evangelii Gaudium*, § 227.

persons might end up in the same fate as the unforgiving servant, where in his anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. Unforgiveness inflicts adverse effects on human relationships. Without forgiveness, “various kinds of selfishness latent in man would transform life and human society into a system of oppression of the weak by the strong, or into an arena of permanent strife between one group and another.”<sup>136</sup> Also, Volf pitches the thought that without forgiveness, would not the purest of loves falter and, at worst, cold indifference reign and deadly hatred easily flare up?<sup>137</sup> Without forgiveness, would not the world be led away from attaining the salvation of God considering that every person who is able to forgive inherits a blessing?

### ***Pastoral Model of Forgiveness as Solution***

The idea of a pastoral model is tied up with the concept of a pastoral activity or a pastoral ministry. The Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church relays that the Church’s social pastoral ministry is defined as the living and concrete expression of the full awareness of her evangelizing mission in the social, economic, cultural and political realities of the world.<sup>138</sup> In a sense, to have a pastoral model would mean to have an instrument that technically supports the Church’s mission of evangelization. The advantage of a pastoral model emerges when Christians are led to discover the truth and to bear witness to it with a spirit of service to the Gospel in the field of social activity.<sup>139</sup> To forgive is apparently difficult and challenging. But, it is necessary because unforgiveness results in many unresolved problems, so finding a suitable pastoral model for forgiveness can just be the solution for it. Hence, “every institution or organization concerned with serving people and saving them in their fundamental dimensions must closely study reconciliation in order to grasp more fully its meaning and significance and in order to draw the necessary practical conclusions.”<sup>140</sup> Persons are held bound to execute forgiveness. It is by succeeding this that they can develop the must-have reconciliation among themselves.

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<sup>136</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980) § 14, at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30111980\\_dives-in-misericordia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html)

<sup>137</sup> Volf, “The Final Reconciliation,” 91–2.

<sup>138</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 524.

<sup>139</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 525.

<sup>140</sup> *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, § 4.

***Threefold Model of Forgiveness: Contributions to the State of Salvation***

The following is an analysis of Volf's theology of forgiveness, divided into three aspects, and their corresponding pastoral impact as they address essential features of Church's teaching on the social dimension of salvation.

**On the Mode of Giving**

Volf surmises that giving beyond what the other person deserves is the foundation of forgiveness.<sup>141</sup> For Volf, forgiveness is a gift. The joy of giving is realized in the anatomy of forgiveness. Forgiving is an act of giving experienced in the same way that an individual receives a gift and it contributes to various aspects of human relationships. In virtue of giving, forgiveness flourishes human generosity. Volf asserts that in forgiving, one actually gives something beyond what others deserve. In the very act of giving, one becomes a generous creature. In the very act of giving, one becomes equipped to exercise forgiveness. If everybody turns out to be generous creatures, one can only imagine a kind of a munificent society that might actually emerge. It will be a society composed of generous citizens, schools having generous students and teachers, homes with generous parents and children, government led by generous officials; churches filled with generous members. If everyone learns to practice generosity, people will inhabit in a society composed of forgiving citizens: schools with forgiving students and teachers, homes with forgiving parents and children, government with forgiving officials, and churches with forgiving faithful. "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:6-8). God will bless generous hearts, and in the exercise of giving, people are rewarded. Giving and forgiving mean reproducing in people's lives some small measure of God's perfection, the God who gives and forgives superabundantly.<sup>142</sup> "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you (Lk. 6:36-38)." The yardstick men use for giving will measure what they receive. Hence, the yardstick men use for understanding and forgiving others will measure the

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<sup>141</sup>Volf, "Giving Forgiveness."

<sup>142</sup>Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today's World, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, (19 March 2018), §81, at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20180319\\_gaudete-et-exsultate.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html)

forgiveness they receive.<sup>143</sup> If persons are saved through the generosity of God, so also will persons, in their own generosity, be able to save others. Every person must therefore be generous.

Forgiveness also contradicts egocentrism. The Church condemns the attitude of “selfishness as the most insidious enemy of an ordered society. History shows how many hearts were devastated when men and women were incapable of recognizing other values or other effective realities apart from material goods, the obsessive quest for which suffocates and blocks their ability to give of themselves.”<sup>144</sup> At times, a person’s unforgiveness isolates him and turns him towards self-centeredness. Thus, unforgiveness results in individualism. In this case, adhering to Volf’s theology of forgiveness is a sure weapon in fighting against selfishness. When selfishness is eradicated in the human culture, the world can certainly be occupied by generous, altruistic, non-individualistic and selfless citizens, who can contribute to the actuality of the social dimension of salvation. Volf’s mode of generosity is an antithesis to *egocentrism*. Egocentrism contradicts the will of God, because instead of urging persons to seek the welfare of their brethren, they are led to serve their own selves as individuals. Egocentrism is an opposition to the quality of salvation. As a pastoral model, Volf’s theology of forgiveness can rescue persons from the exaltation of the self as embodied in the reality of egocentrism.<sup>145</sup> Instead, it stimulates appreciation and affection towards others. It disintegrates persons from concentrating too much on the self to give more attention to others. Implicitly, the priority and the central goal of Volf’s theology of forgiveness are directed towards the welfare of the “other.”

The concept of *self-donation* also emerges from Volf’s discourses on giving and forgiving. It was exactly in the self-donation of Christ that humanity received salvation. So also is this true among human beings in their relationships with one another. Volf believes that an individual’s identity is not self-enclosed. He adds that the self is shaped by making space for the other and by giving space to the other, by being enriched when it inhabits the other and by sharing of its plenitude when it is inhabited by the other.<sup>146</sup> The self gives of itself, of its own space, so to

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<sup>143</sup>*Gaudete et Exsultate*, §81.

<sup>144</sup>*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 581.

<sup>145</sup>Volf, *Free of Charge*, 125.

<sup>146</sup>Volf, “The Trinity is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 3 (July 1998): 410.

speak, in a movement in which it contracts itself in order to be expanded by the other and in which at the same time it enters the contracted other in order to increase the other's plentitude.<sup>147</sup> Volf's concept of giving fits the cycle of exchange between perfect lovers, and from here, the perfect cycle of self-donations is initiated, which conforms to what God conceives as a communion of perfect lovers.<sup>148</sup> In granting forgiveness and being forgiving, persons are turned into a person of love and then a gift-giver.<sup>149</sup> Thus, if love and generosity prevail among persons, the mental portrait of a reconciled world in the final eschaton becomes more realizable. If a movement of self-donating acts is to be pursued by every person, as in a manner of giving a gift even to those who do not deserve it, then there would definitely exist a society that forms part of the Kingdom of God, where an endless exchange of love goes on forever.

### **On the Injunction to Remember Rightly**

The injunction to remember rightly is a positive response to the phenomenon of human indignation, revenge and hostility. Volf recommends this in completing the process of forgiveness, to heal wounded persons and their relations to others, especially their relation to the perpetrators.<sup>150</sup> Volf's injunction to remember rightly helps overcome the human urge for hostility. Volf suggests that for one to experience complete healing from a wounded past, that is to say, to experience forgiveness, one has to remember and to hold onto memories. However, in doing so, one has to engage "not plainly in remembering events but also in looking at memories in a new light" and this is where Volf formulates the injunction "Remember rightly!" Remembrance is redemptive in purpose. In remembering rightly, a person is led to see and utilize memories as instruments of peace rather than deadly weapons that ferment conflicts. Remembering rightly allows one to integrate all experiences into a larger framework of meaning. In this way, victims are kept from harming others and becoming aggressors themselves. In it, they learn to appreciate their memories of sufferings or wrongdoing in a meaningful way, subsiding all possible occasions of violence and hostility. Remembering rightly is a shield against injustice rather than a sword against perpetrators, thereby preventing the spiraling of evil acts, and the proliferation of the human drive for revenge.

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<sup>147</sup>Volf, "The Trinity is Our Social Program," 412.

<sup>148</sup>Volf, "The Trinity is Our Social Program," 415.

<sup>149</sup>Volf, "Giving Forgiveness."

<sup>150</sup>Volf, "God's Forgiveness and Ours," 213.

Moreover, the exercise of remembering rightly is a means for human goodness to prevail. In His work of salvation, God desires to carry out the goodness of His entire creation, discounting evil and sin. In His goodness, God created man out of love and whoever He loves, He saves. The world comes from God's wisdom and goodness. Men are assured that God works for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). As a pastoral model, Volf's theology of forgiveness, particularly in the task of remembering rightly, is attuned to the Lord's desire to elicit the good in His creatures. Volf's injunction induces people to acknowledge the good in whatever experience there is. Volf posits that "a world that keeps alive the memory of all wrongdoings suffered and not just of horrendous evils would not be a place with uplifted radiant faces but faces whose eyes are downcast in shame. It would not be a place of delight in one another but a place enveloped in the mist of profound sadness." For redemption to be actualized, a person needs to forget in a manner that transforms memories of hurt and pain into meaningful events of empowerment, perseverance, and hope. In Volf's injunction, persons can disseminate goodness and annihilate evil. Forgiveness is centered on goodness against the context of being treated unfairly and indignantly by others. Volf believes that forgiveness allows the individual to return to the good. If persons are saved through the goodness of God, so should persons in their goodness be able to save others as well. Hence, every person is called to be good.

As a pastoral model, Volf's theology of forgiveness also arouses in persons the drive for conversion. Forgiveness leads to change, and change affects other relationships. The experience of forgiveness is then regenerative and transformative. Volf's theology of forgiveness accompanies the experience of *metanoia* (repentance, change of heart) which comes with great value toward the completion of salvation. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out (Acts 3:19)." Volf's injunction to remember rightly implicitly carries along with it the campaign for Christians to embrace change. It is a great hope that by offering forgiveness as a gift to underserving others, persons will be converted and turn away from their old violent and hostile selves. Conversion must involve a change of heart as well as a change of actions. In conversion, one renounces the old self and the egoism that is destructive to the community. Volf's theology of forgiveness, henceforth, reinforces the constant revision of one's conception of the wrongdoing in order to build better relationships and better communities. In the assimilation of the injunction to remember rightly, persons are enthused to revise their ways of addressing issues of hatred, bitterness, resentments and grudge

in a manner that ushers a more positive disposition that brings about the discovery of the meaning and value of their human experiences. The application of remembering rightly makes the process of conversion realizable, from which the conformity to Christ is made possible. Still, forgiveness is an unending process until full conversion happens. "It is necessary to be converted, to embrace the demands of the Kingdom in order to be a disciple of Jesus."<sup>151</sup> Volf made mentioned that the injunction to remember rightly guides victims to avoid getting into similarly injurious situations they once were trapped into and to seek after the restoration in some measure their inner well-being after being disturbed by a traumatic event. In remember rightly, persons turn toward something new and positive and veer away from the negative. The process of remembering rightly is an ingredient in the recipe of conversion, that leads to salvation. Needless to say that conversion is an essential element of salvation. It is the effect of God's work on man. If someone is genuinely saved, he or she turns and goes a completely different direction. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17).

### **On the Metaphor of Embrace**

Volf provides a template on how to overcome "the stark polarity of "either us or them", maintaining that it is possible to break the cycle of violence and to live as a community that embraces rather than excludes."<sup>152</sup> Volf's metaphor of embrace is a proposal that centralizes God's reception of hostile humanity into divine communion as a model for how human beings should relate to one other. It highlights the importance of reconciliation as a key factor in Christian social engagement. A prominent advantage of Volf's pastoral assimilation of forgiveness in the sphere of human relationships is grounded on the eradication of social exclusion. Volf urges Christians to give a genuine embrace that neither pretends acceptance nor crushes others,<sup>153</sup> because everyone has a place in the Kingdom of God. To exclude persons, especially when they are seen to be at fault, would mean removing their chances of partaking at the table-fellowship of the Lord. Volf's metaphor of embrace suggests that nobody gets disregarded despite having erred. Since reconciliation,

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<sup>151</sup>*Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Updated Second Edition.* ed. Xavier Leon-Dufour. (Philippines: Paulines, 1996), 294.

<sup>152</sup>Corneliu Constantineanu, "Exclusion and Embrace: Reconciliation in the Works of Miroslav Volf," *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 7, (2013): 41.

<sup>153</sup>Volf, "Social Meaning of Reconciliation," 169.

in Christian theology, is an element of salvation, it is logical to say that the metaphor of embrace can be a guide to actualize the social dimension of salvation. In adhering to the metaphor of embrace, persons can make progress in their exercise of reconciliation, where inclusivity rests and the phenomenon of exclusion is abolished. The metaphor of embrace fulfills social love. What is built on selfless and benevolent love will not pass away. It is man's most important contribution to the transforming work of Christ, and like God's love, it will remain. Selfless love is men's contribution to the final reality, the "new creation." Toward that we labor by seeking to transform the world now by works of love."<sup>154</sup> Where there is love, there is salvation. Volf's metaphor of embrace instructs and directs persons to overcome bitterness, resentments and grudges, and to submit to the very law imposed by Jesus on the world, that is, the law of love. As it necessitates the understanding of others, can eradicate indifference and hatred, especially in the lives of Christians, who ought "to cultivate the need to forgive which is inherent in Christian love."<sup>155</sup> In effect of this social love is the fostering of friendships. Salvation is defined as friendship and fellowship with God. Similarly describing salvation as communion and friendship with God, Origin teaches that along with faith, living and entering the very life taught by Jesus can elevate one to friendship and communion with God. In Volf's metaphor of embrace, persons are encouraged to exercise an inclusive and friendly attitude toward others whom they consider their enemies, perpetrators, aggressors, or wrongdoers. Volf asserts that "at the very heart of Christian tradition is this idea that the enemy is there as a human being who needs to be embraced, who needs to be taken into the fold, who needs to be made from an enemy into a friend."<sup>156</sup> The effects of embrace are socially redeeming. It paves the way for friendships among people to flourish.

Considering the influx of social exclusion, persons need to respond to the call for an amicable Church that welcomes everyone who knocks at her doors and seeks refuge. If Christians imbibe the kind of embrace that the father showed his defiant son (Luke 15: 11-32) and consider it as a practical approach in dealing with others, the Church

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<sup>154</sup>Lawler, et al. ed., *The Teaching of Christ*, 528.

<sup>155</sup>John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), §83 (Philippines, Paulines, 1981).

<sup>156</sup>Bob Abernethy, "Miroslav Volf," *Religion and Ethics News Weekly*, April 2, 2004, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2004/04/02/april-2-2004-miroslav-volf/1042/> (accessed October 8, 2018).



will truly become a friendly place for all regardless of one's race, class, social status, and imperfections. If Christians adopt Volf's metaphor of embrace, which yearns to abolish enmities and forge friendships in the whole human community instead, the Church is sure to become a communion of friendly disciples whom Jesus Himself desired (Jn. 15:15). "Unfriendly Christians are doomed to defeat." If Volf's metaphor of embrace effectively works in forming friendly Christians, it can be expected that the Church shall become a more amiable entity that welcomes not only her own members, but even those outside of her. Corresponding to the development of inclusivity is the proliferation of communion. Communion is the very life of salvation. Pope Benedict XVI defines communion as the origin and goal of the entire mystery of salvation,<sup>157</sup> whereby in becoming man, Christ unites Himself with every human being, and for them, in turn, to have fellowship with one another. Volf's metaphor of embrace is a basis for building up the communion of persons. It functions as a key to pastoral unity. Responding to Volf's metaphor of embrace is same as responding to the challenge of becoming creators of communion. Essentially, Volf's proposal is regarded as selfless and other-centered, implying that one has to go out from the self and learning to die to his/her own ego, to his/her own ideas, thus embracing others with love, and deposing arrogance that marginalizes others. All of these then sets a beautiful attribute for communion.<sup>158</sup> Volf's metaphor of embrace illustrates the participation of both victims and perpetrators alike in the communitarian operation towards a communion grounded on forgiveness and reconciliation.

### **Volf and Catholic Church on Forgiveness: Comparison and Contrast**

Not completely alienated to the Catholic Church, Volf exhibits similar treatment on forgiveness. First, he pointed out the role of grace. He mentions that in forgiving, the presence of grace is necessary. The Catholic Church, meanwhile indoctrinates that grace is a supernatural help God gives to man so that he partake of His divine nature and be respond to the call to eternal life.<sup>159</sup> Volf and the Catholic Church do

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<sup>157</sup>Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratnzingger: Life in the Church and Living Theology: Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 66.

<sup>158</sup>"Communion as a Gift." Recollection Notes, Recoletos Formation Center, January 2019., 4.

<sup>159</sup>CCC, 1996.

share a common stance, both being able to identify grace as an important element in the exercise of forgiveness. Thus, Volf ascribes that for “whatever the reasons, when forgiveness happens it is always a miracle of grace.”<sup>160</sup>

The second similar aspect found among Volf’s theology of forgiveness and of the Catholic Church is their say on the law of retaliation. Volf mentions that prior to the completion of forgiveness, persons need to nix the very concept of revenge. Likewise, on account of the Lord’s prayer, the Catholic Church asserts that getting even is non-Christian. Persons who follow the path of the Lord should rather put into practice the law of love instead the other way round. Hence, the Our Father articulates: “forgive as our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Mt. 6:12). Basically, both parties agree that in order to forgive, any intention that complements *lex talionis* is to be primarily disregarded.

Volf’s theology of forgiveness also takes hold of the Parable of the Prodigal Son as a foundation in addressing the sins of persons. In introducing his discourse on the metaphor of embrace, Volf uses the said parable as foundation to actualize forgiveness amidst the reality human conflict. Likewise, the Catholic Church esteems the gesture of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son as a model to Christians in addressing repentant sinners who seek to return to God through the sacrament of Penance. Correspondingly, Volf and the Catholic Church seem to agree that in forgiving, persons are to emulate the father attitude in the parable of the prodigal son, who instead of rejecting, reaccepted his erring son without hesitations.

Furthermore, Volf also highlights the exceptional license of all men to receive forgiveness despite being underserving of it. Here, he treats the social dimension of forgiveness, which amiably shows concordance to the standpoint of Catholic Church regarding the duty of every believer to extend forgiveness to one another. Forgiveness is essential to the Catholic faith, since God has forgiven, so should man do the same to his brethren. Mainly in this aspect, Volf and the Catholic Church are on the same boat. Both uphold that everybody deserves forgiveness.

Among the similarities shown, there is one salient contrast that exists between Volf and the Catholic Church’s perspective on forgiveness. Apparently, the difference is deciphered on the matter concerning the

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<sup>160</sup>Quotation from *Goodreads*, [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/6215.Miroslav\\_Volf](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/6215.Miroslav_Volf)

sacrament of confession. The Catholic Church teaches that by the sacraments of baptism and penance, all sins are remitted and blotted out. However, since Volf's is protestant theologian, it was expected that the relevance of the sacraments in the process of forgiveness will not be discussed. Out of the seven sacraments that Catholics believe, the Protestant Church identifies only two – baptism and confession. As anticipated, Volf did not give any reliance nor adherence to the sacramental power of confession in his theology of forgiveness. Although he made mention of the Trinity: God, Christ and the Holy Spirit in his elaborations but, the sacrament of penance never came into his consideration.

### ***Means of Salvation: A Catholic Perspective***

Means of salvation for persons comes in fourfold. Firstly, is their adherence to the faith. The Church Fathers acclaims the necessity of faith for salvation. Faith's new way of seeing things is centered on Christ. Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him, people's lives become radically open to a love that precedes them, a love that transforms them from within, acting in and through them.<sup>161</sup> Faith is the necessary and only channel (Jn. 5: 24; 17:3) to receive the gift of eternal life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says "faith is the beginning of eternal life. It is faith that makes man tastes in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of his journey here below. Then man shall see God 'face to face', 'as He is'" (1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Jn. 3:2.).<sup>162</sup> As St. Paul puts it: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).<sup>163</sup> Secondly, is incorporation to the Church. Membership to the Church also corresponds to the actuality of the social dimension of salvation. "Rising from the dead (Rom. 6:9) He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation."<sup>164</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* supports this by saying that "every benefit which the people of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is 'the universal sacrament of salvation', simultaneously manifesting and raising the mystery of God's love."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Francis, Encyclical Letter on Faith, *Lumen Fidei*, (23 June 2013), § 20, at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papafrancesco\\_20130629\\_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papafrancesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html)

<sup>162</sup>CCC, 163.

<sup>163</sup>*Lumen Fidei*, § 19.

<sup>164</sup>*Lumen Gentium*, § 48.

<sup>165</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, § 45.

Individuals incorporated in the Church ought to extend their service of salvation to all nations, to all peoples, to the whole world. Thirdly, is the reception of the sacraments. This is assertion is best supported by the sacraments of baptism and penance. For baptism, the Catholic Church declares that it is necessary for salvation and even the Lord affirms to this (Jn. 3:5). When persons put on Christ in baptism, they become an entirely new creature and obtain the full and complete remission of every sin. Meanwhile, it is with great effort and with great compunction on the persons' part that they obtain the same newness and sinlessness in the sacrament of penance, for such is the stipulation of divine justice.<sup>166</sup> Lastly, is doing good works. Commitment to charitable acts is a practical means of obtaining salvation. Persons can subject themselves to various works of mercy which help express their benevolent intentions toward their neighbors. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the so-called *works of mercy* are charitable acts by which a person come to the aid of their neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities (Is. 58:6-7; Heb. 13:3). These works of mercy can be classified as either spiritual or corporal. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving and patiently bearing wrongs are the spiritual works of mercy. Meanwhile, corporal works of mercy encompass giving alms to the poor, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, and burying the dead (Mt. 25:31-46). All of these are witnesses to fraternal charity which pleases God.<sup>167</sup>

In matters of salvation, people need to stay committed in doing good works. This being so, the researcher proposes now a course of action that seeks to guide persons, most especially Christians, on their endeavor to obtain eternal life and participate in the social dimension of salvation. Amidst the pressing need of reconciliation between warring countries, families under feud, contending religions, and individuals in conflict, the researcher coins the GRELC (**Give, Remember, Embrace Like Christ**) pastoral model for forgiveness, whereby in the light of Volf's theology of forgiveness, it can serve as a vehicle that Christians can ride on to arrive at the Kingdom of God. Also the researcher believes that the GRELC pastoral model for forgiveness as a platform can be used by Christians to grow in charity and love of neighbor.

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<sup>166</sup>*Paenitentiam Agere*, §16.

<sup>167</sup>CCC, 2447.

***Human Action: Criterion for Deliverance***

In Matthew 7: 21, Christ declares: "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of heaven but he who hears the word of God and does it." Christ had little, if not no time for mere notional assent. Christ is the source of all reality. He is the supreme realist. As such, his words always contain an implicit call to action, change, and conversion. With this in mind, the actions of man can condition his entry to the Kingdom, for God "will repay each person according to what they have done" (Rom. 2: 6).

Faith alone cannot measure up to shape one's own the salvation. It has to be coupled with action. Human beings are endowed with free will, allowing them make choices. Thus, for every choice comes a corresponding consequence. "The evil man will not go unpunished, but the descendants of the righteous will be delivered" (Proverbs 11:21). Performance does counts. Asides from adhering to the faith, incorporating oneself to the Church, and receiving of the sacraments, man can also look into the credibility of his actions as one of God's criteria to attain salvation. It is therefore the researcher's yearning to assimilate his proposed GRELC pastoral model of forgiveness to enrich human performance to be qualified for salvation. This pastoral model seeks to assist persons amidst their struggles in facing their humanity, to develop a more Christ-like lifestyle, to cultivate generosity, charity, friendship, communion, and thus secure their chances of receiving God's merit of redemption.

**GRELC Pastoral Model for Forgiveness: Course of Action**

Cognizant of the significance brought about by a pastoral model in the anatomy of social relationships, the researcher qualifies Volf's theology of forgiveness to be a functional pastoral model, adequately capable of repairing the damage done due to conflicts and eventually, fulfilling the Church's standpoint on salvation as a social responsibility of every person. By formulating the GREC pastoral model of forgiveness, the researcher intends to assist Christians to enliven the core values expected of them. The GREC pastoral model of forgiveness aims to revisit at the experiences of Christ on account of being generous, memorious and inclusive. The GREC model seeks to develop a paradigm that shapes Christians to act upon the value of forgiveness in the context of their human and social relationships.

**Give like Christ**

Forgive and you will be forgiven. Patterned to the generosity of Christ, Christians should also be generous in extending forgiveness to others even to the most unforgivable individuals in the society. Jesus was generous in coming to live with human being “in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7). He came to share a new vision for living with humility, charity, compassion and mercy. Christ demonstrated his generosity by involving himself in the concerns of people. Wherever Jesus encountered human need, people received more than they hoped for. The paralytic man was restored of his mobility and his relationship with God (Mark 2:1-4). The hemorrhaging woman was healed in body and restored to dignity in community (Mark 5:25-34). When he put on a feast of fish and chips, there were seven donkey-cargo baskets of leftovers (John 6:1-15). At another meal, Jesus not only acted as Passover host but took the role of household slave and washed the disciples’ dirty feet (John 13:1-17). Jesus was downright generous. He always did more than what is expected. Jesus generously risked his life for the sake of God’s kingdom of justice and righteousness on earth as it is in heaven. He risked his life for God’s redeeming work in the world in obedience to God’s call on his life. He gave up his life for a greater cause. He lived generosity in his incarnation, his ministry, his persecution and his death. St. Paul says: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Philippians 2:3). The generosity of Jesus should soak into the minds of Christians and permeate their worldview. Christians should allow the generosity of Jesus to transform their selfish and greedy behavior. They should be generous just like Jesus.

**Remember like Christ**

Pope Francis says the “the believer is essentially one who remembers.”<sup>168</sup> Christians are to rely on their memory in the expression of their faith. The Church herself makes her memory of the Passion of the Lord, which believers are always to remember. For the Lord Himself told: “Do this in memory of me.” Christians are to stay close to the memory of the Church, which is the presence of the Lord in front of them.<sup>169</sup> After

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<sup>168</sup>*Evangelii Gaudium*, §13.

<sup>169</sup>Francis, Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae “The Joy of Christian Memory” (3 October 2013), at the Holy See, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie\\_20131003\\_christian-memory.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20131003_christian-memory.html)

falling into sin, believers should never be forgetful of God's presence, Who is ready to forgive them at all times, thus remembering the very reason why Christ offered himself to death. Christians are to return to the experience of Jesus' sufferings in a meaningful way, subsiding all possible occasions of violence and hostility. For Jesus himself, being able to understand the human condition of his enemies, never plotted out vengeance. Nobody is made perfect and impeccable. This being so, Christians should always be memorious of Christ's compassion and mercy to his persecutors. Mindful of the sinful humanity, Christians better ask God to grant sinners forgiveness instead of punishment. Christians are called to remember the sacrifice of Christ otherwise, "when such memories are subdued, they will eventually move away and become a mere recollection. It cannot warm the heart, and can neither give joy nor strength." Additionally, Pope Francis says that "the encounter with memory is an event of salvation, an encounter with the love of God Who has made history with us and has saved us. It is so beautiful that we have been saved, and we must celebrate this,"<sup>170</sup> The memory of Christ's paschal mystery is always to be celebrated. It is in the memory of his passion, death and resurrection that the hope of salvation lives on until the present time. Christians should allow the memory of Christ enlighten them on the redemptive value of forgiveness and strengthen their hope for salvation. To remember like Christ means to be mindful that everyone sins nonetheless, everyone could be forgiven because of God. Christians ought to be memorious of the sacrifices of Jesus, who brought the whole world to salvation.

### **Embrace like Christ**

"During his public life, Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness. He reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God's forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God (Luke 15; 19:9)."<sup>171</sup> As Christians, who follow the footsteps of the welcoming Christ, they are to accept and befriend sinners (Matthew 11:19) with open arms and willing hearts. Christians should begin to reserve a space in themselves and invite enemies to enter to it. As a Church called to be inclusive, Christians ought to demonstrate

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<sup>170</sup>Francis, "The Joy of Christian Memory."

<sup>171</sup>CCC, 1443.

an encompassing friendly attitude to anyone regardless of his/her sins. Christians belong to a Church that should not tolerate exclusivism, snobbery and discrimination. Embracing like Christ is a condition to be asserted by Christians as the pay respect, show kindness, benevolence, extend charity, and bestow mercy upon everyone. Like the father of the Prodigal Son, Christians must bring the lost sheep back to the God's flock, to help them strive for repentance and contrition, and to seek the merciful love of God. Christians should allow the embrace of Christ perpetuate in the lives of others. In responding to the call forgiveness, they should shun the tendency to exclude and nurture acceptance and loving concern towards all. For it is in the ministry of Jesus that he welcomed sinners and reconciled them with the Father" (Luke 5: 20, 27-32, 7:48). One instance was when Jesus ate and drink with sinners which gave great offense to his critics. Nonetheless, the fact that Jesus extended a table-fellowship with them signified an offer of reconciliation and salvation on the part of Jesus and therefore of his Father also.<sup>172</sup> Elsewhere, commenting on this practice, Joachim Jeremias writes: "The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God."<sup>173</sup>

### **Forgivers as Participants of Christ's Mission of Salvation**

The praxis of Volf's theology of forgiveness can correspondingly hone a generation of forgivers who, by being equipped to give, remember and embrace, are made capable of becoming participants of Christ's mission of salvation. To forgive is a salvific act not only between God and man but also between and among men themselves. Salvation is a social responsibility to be addressed in virtue of forgiveness, because salvation is never individualistic. Salvation is never a solo project or a one-man enterprise. The idea of salvation as an activity with social relevance is true and Volf's theology of forgiveness practically supports and complements such an idea. God sent Christ to teach people how to forgive others which in turn results in saving them as well. As Jesus saves, so also should His followers be by participating on the divine mission. In the name of charity, Christians are duty-bound to rescue their erring brothers from the spiral of sin, and this is most likely to be done as this proposes, through the threefold way of forgiving (give, remember and embrace). Forgiveness is the road to salvation. Heaven is experienced

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<sup>172</sup>Coffey, *The Sacrament of Reconciliation*, 35.

<sup>173</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden, (London: SCM Press, 1971), 116.



here on earth when one genuinely forgives the other from the heart, like how Jesus on the cross forgave His captors. There is no entering into the Father's Kingdom if one remains hardened and unforgiving.<sup>174</sup> As a partly spiritual being, man is destined to be a citizen of a spiritual eternal Kingdom and while on earth, he has the duty and the responsibility of preparing for citizenship in that Kingdom. Thus, what better preparation can one undertake than to take the path of forgiveness.<sup>175</sup> Forgiveness works in the service of salvation, granted that one is capable of forgiving. The very act of forgiveness can contribute to the building up of the Kingdom on earth. Hence, mercy is the very way in which God forgives. Pope Francis claims that "to have mercy is to have "a hand to raise you, an embrace to save you, forgive you, pick you up, flood you with infinite, patient, indulgent love; to put you back on your feet."<sup>176</sup> To be forgiven arouses a sensational feeling of being saved, rescued and redeemed. In realizing that forgiveness is an important aspect of salvation, it should be considered that without the former the latter cannot be attained. The history of salvation is a history of God's loving forgiveness.<sup>177</sup> Persons, upon being saved from sin, belong to a saving community. However, since persons through the death of Christ have been forgiven from sin, they in turn should form part of a forgiving community. Succinctly, a saving community should always be a forgiving community. One should understand that Jesus' rule of forgiveness is the essential component that links men to the Father in heaven.<sup>178</sup> Without forgiveness, salvation cannot be possible. Persons can exemplify the very act of saving others by starting to forgive them of their failures and mistakes, mainly because it is through forgiveness, the way Christ did, that persons experience salvation.

## Conclusion

In a world racked by violence, indignation, injustice and all forms of evil, human nature finds it difficult to resist being pulled into the vortex of conflict. More often than not, there appears the challenge

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<sup>174</sup>Bosco, *Radical Forgiveness*, xiii.

<sup>175</sup>Kevin O' Sullivan, OFM, *The Sunday Readings Cycle A*, (Dublin Assisi Press, 1971), 362-363.

<sup>176</sup>Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 16.

<sup>177</sup>Cirilo Almario, *Wellspring of Christ; Spiritual Reflections Based on Sacred Scriptures*, 84.

<sup>178</sup>Bosco, *Radical Forgiveness*, 147.

to remain reconciled with one another. When offended, persons tend to immediately seek vengeance and annihilate their enemies. However, theologian Miroslav Volf dismisses the option of revenge or retribution by implicating a threefold model for forgiveness that pursues the transformation of emotions and human relationships. Volf designed a theology of forgiveness that is made more realizable in the dynamics of generosity, memory and inclusion. Hence, all of which is directed to the goal of salvation.

Salvation is always a social event; salvation is corporate where God gathers together peoples of different kinds. Salvation is offered to all and is made concretely available to all. The Catholic Church fundamentally upholds that salvation is a mission entrusted to Christ. Fulfilling the divine will in the events of his death, passion, and resurrection, Christ completely shaped the salvation of humanity and persons, as recipients of such salvation, are called to participate to it. Considering this, the pastoral relevance of Volf's theology of forgiveness on account of salvation now comes to play. As the researcher endeavors to cope with the challenging realities pertaining to violence, indignation and injustice people experience nowadays, the researcher concedes that Volf's theology of forgiveness is apt to serve as a pastoral model that can benefit the whole human community.. The pastoral model drawn from Volf's theology of forgiveness thrives to orient and recommend the right Christian attitudes against selfishness, hostility, and exclusion. It is adequate enough to transform human society and configure individuals in the likeness of the Person of the Forgiving Savior, Jesus Christ.

The pastoral assimilation of Volf's threefold model for forgiveness enthruses individuals to form part of a forgiving community, who upon being engrossed with the spirit of giving, attuned to the recollection of memories, and accustomed to a friendly attitude towards sinners, will certainly promote Christ-like values that complement the ideals expected for the social dimension of salvation. The idea of forgiveness is inseparable from the idea of salvation. Henceforth, as the community of forgivers flourish and multiply by the practical application of Volf's threefold model for forgiveness, so will the participants of the divine mission. Forgivers, by acting upon the values asserted in Volf's theology of forgiveness, can qualify as saving instruments of God. The social ramification of forgiveness is important. Forgiven people should forgive others. As one is forgiven, he/she too must forgive. The same

applies to the ramification of salvation. Redeemed people ought to redeem others. As man is saved, he too should save the ones trapped in the hands evil. Conclusively, in the act of forgiving others, there lies the pastoral implication of saving them from the snares of evil and regaining them the merit of God's justification.



# Kingdom of Heaven: A Life-Paradigm for the Poor in Spirit (Matt 5:3)

Leander V. Barrot, OAR

## Abstract

*This article intends to understand the concept of the “Kingdom of Heaven” in Matthew. Specifically, the article focuses on the narrative of the Beatitudes in Matthew (Mat 5:3-12).*

In Matthew, Jesus begins his teaching ministry with the famous beatitudes. The first beatitude is Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεῖα τῶν οὐρανῶν (Mat 5:3) lit. “The poor ones in spirit are blessed because of them is the kingdom of heaven.”

## Grammatical Structure and Components of Mat 5:3

Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεῖα τῶν οὐρανῶν

The first beatitude is a compound sentence made up of an independent clause “The poor ones in spirit are blessed”—the protasis; and a dependent clause “for to them is the kingdom of heaven”—the apodosis.

The main clause is composed of two adjectives *makarioi* and *ptōkoi*. The second adjective (*ptōkoi*) having the article is substantival and is the subject. The first adjective (*makarioi*) is the predicate adjective.

Thus, we have a case of predication—"The poor ones are blessed;" or for the sake of emphasis "Blessed are the poor ones."

The noun *tō pneūmati* is a dative of respect.<sup>1</sup> The implication of the use of the dative is that for as long as the poor "in respect to the spirit" remain to be poor, they are blessed (*makarioi*)

The dependent clause is introduced by the conjunction "*hoti*" which functions as causal or result clause.<sup>2</sup> It provides the reason why the "poor in spirit" is blessed—they have the "kingdom of heaven." From the grammatical perspective, the kingdom of heaven is the condition or reason or cause without which, the poor ones, for as long as "in respect to their spirit" remain to be poor, will become blessed.

αὐτοῖς ἐστὶν is an interesting construction. The regular construction could have been with the use of dative (*autois*) indicating dative of possession (to them is) which is regular with verbs "to be."<sup>3</sup> It looks that Matthew preferred the genitive plural *autōn*, expressing possession to parallel with the genitive plural *tōn ouranōn* (αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεῖα τῶν οὐρανῶν).

## The Poor: To Whom the Kingdom of Heaven Belongs

### *Ptōkos*

The Greek term *ptōkos* etymologically has the sense of "to bow down timidly."<sup>4</sup> It carries the sense of begging or destitution. To be destitute means not having any personal property to live with; thus, the

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<sup>1</sup>Max Zerwick, S.J. and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996): 9.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979): 589.

<sup>3</sup>Erick G. Jay, *New Testament Greek: An Introductory Grammar* (Cambridge: University Press, 1958): 62.

<sup>4</sup>Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VI P – R "ptwco,j in the Greek World," by Friedrich Hauck (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968): 886.

poor resorts to asking help from others by means of begging. In many instances it denotes complete destitution.<sup>5</sup>

*Ptōkos* has various equivalents in the Old Testament, which meanings most probably have influenced the narrative of the beatitudes.<sup>6</sup> This term *ptōkos* translates various Hebrew vocabularies adopting their meanings to the koine *ptōkos*: (a) *'anî* “denotes a state of lowliness or distress and hence a man in a state of reduced competence and lesser worth”; (b) *dall* this has reference to physical weakness or social status; (c) “*ebyon*” which is derived from tri-consonantal stem “*abh*” “to will” meaning to be willing.”<sup>7</sup>

The term poor then while it has the negation of financial, material or property aspect primarily signified, also implies other types of poverty as signified by its various equivalent vocabularies in the Old Testament.

### *pneumati*

John Delhousaye, takes this dative as instrumental dative and refers this to the action of the Holy Spirit. He sees in the text, Jesus as invoking the action of the Holy Spirit with reference to Isa 61:1,

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good tidings to the oppressed (poor), to bring up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners.

Thus, the authors translates the phrase as “Blessed by the Spirit are the destitute”<sup>8</sup> Zerwick and earlier commentators of scriptures indicate that the dative’s function is that of respect.<sup>9</sup> Authors translating the text as “in spirit” seem to echo the same perspective.<sup>10</sup> The dative

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Matthew obviously uses much of the Old Testament in his literature e.g. in the Birth Narratives he quotes from OT to show to his readers the continuity of the story of Jesus with the prophesy of the OT.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. p. 888.

<sup>8</sup>John Delhousaye, *Sermon on the Mount: A Guide to the Greek Text* (Sonoran Desert: Phoenix Seminary Press, 2018): 26-27.

<sup>9</sup>Zerwick, “A Grammatical Analysis...”: 9.

<sup>10</sup>Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard et. al., eds., *World Biblical Commentary. Vol, 33A Matthew 1-13* by Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000): 91; Daniel J. Harrington, ed., *Sacra Pagina, Vol 1 The Gospel of Matthew* by Daniel Harrington (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991): 79,

of respect qualifies the term “poor” (*ptōkos*) rather than “blessed” (*makarioi*). However, this qualification does not necessarily mean the spiritualizing of the concept of the poor. On the contrary the concept of the poor—literally the destitute, the beggar, and those not having properties of their own—is still implied and considered as primary by the narrative of Matthew. The dative of respect gives additional value, character, and qualification to the concept of the poor ones. In the words of Hare,

Poor in spirit ... refers neither to those who are poor for religious reasons (the voluntarily poor) nor those who are deficient with respect to spirit (the dispirited) but rather to those poor who manifest the attitude (the “spirit”) appropriate to their condition, namely, humble dependence on God’s grace.”<sup>11</sup>

This qualification of the poor in Matthew, does not altogether exclude the rich as may be assumed by the addition of the dative “*pneumati*”. Even the affluent and the rich may be considered as poor “in spirit” if they assume an attitude and a life perspective signified by the “beatitudes”. Brown makes such observation when he comments,

Seemingly Matt’s community has people who are not physically poor and hungry; and the evangelist wants them to know that there was an outreach of Jesus for them as well, if they have attitudes attuned to the kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

## The Poor Ones in the Context of the Beatitudes

### ***Makarios (Blessed): The Primary Character of Believers***

The Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5-7) is the first great insertion of Matthew<sup>13</sup> to the narrative structure of Mark relative to the teaching

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<sup>11</sup>James Luther Mays ed., *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Matthew* by Douglar R A. Hare (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993): 37.

<sup>12</sup>Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997): 179.

<sup>13</sup>Charles E. Carlston, “Betz on the Sermon on the Mound—A Critique,” *CBQ* vol. 50, no. 1 (1988): 47-48. The author mentions that Hans Diether Betz prior to his Commentary on the Sermon of the Mount, opined that Mat 5-7 “is essentially a document that existed prior to Matthew’s gospel.... Betz ascribes the document to a strict Jewish-Christian community, in which it was composed about A.D. 50.”



ministry of Jesus. It is inserted between the call of the first disciples—Simon, Andrew and James and John (Mk 1:16-20) and The first miracle—The Man with Unclean Spirit (Mk 1:23-28). The thematic context in both Mark and Matthew is about the authority (*exousia*) of Jesus. This authority that Jesus manifest is different from the leaders—“he (Jesus) taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mat 7:29; Mk 1:22). From the narrative structure of Matthew therefore, Jesus is presented as a teacher far above the rest or more authoritative than the leaders and teachers of their time. Jesus as teacher is captured in the opening verses of the whole Sermon on the Mount,

“When Jesus saw the crowd, he went up the mountain;  
and his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak and  
taught them, saying...” (Mat 5:1-2).

The Beatitudes (Mat 5:3-12), the first instruction or teaching of Jesus in the long section of the Sermon on the Mount, may be taken as paradigm of life for the believers of the Matthean Community. It is the new identity marker of believers. The beatitudes, the new paradigm of life and behavior, will distinguish the disciples of Jesus from the rest of the people.

The term “*makarios*”, although an adjective (predicate adjective) to “the poor ones” stands first in the sentence construction. This positioning of the adjective does not only signify emphasis (it stands first and is repeatedly used vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, & 11) but connotes predication and identification. Namely, that “blessedness” is not only one of the many characteristics of the disciples of Jesus in Matthew, but is the primary characteristic, the character of Christian believers of the members of the Matthean community.

The adjective *makarios* is derived from *makar* which is often referred to certain characteristics of gods of the Greek. It denotes a kind of happiness of the gods who labors not, has no cares and whose life does not end with death. Latter, this term was applied to man attributing a god-like blessedness not in the present life but in the life-after in a blessed place. It is likened to the happy state of the gods beyond and above the sufferings endured by people on earth and beyond the necessity to endure the daily toils and earthy labor for sustenance. It is a blessedness attributed to the god-like.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Gerhard Kittel, ed. and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. & trans., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, L – N “maka,rioj( makari,zw( makarismo,j” by F. Hauck (Grand Rapids Michigan: WM. B.

### The Poor: Blessed but Persecuted

From the narrative of the Beatitudes one is able to identify what the “poor ones” are going through or experiencing. Behind the text of v.4 are people who are mourning who definitely are in need of comforting, “Blessed are those who mourn.”

H. Balz observes that participle *penqou/ntej* (the ones mourning) refers to people who are in the state of grief expressing itself in tears, lament and mourning rituals.<sup>15</sup> In the Lukan parallel, *penqou/ntej* is contrasted with the woes in Lk 6:25 “woe to those who laugh (*gela,w*). The same v.4 in Matthew does not tell us why they are mourning. Verse 11, by way of delayed identification, gives specific reasons why the believers of the Matthean community, were mourning or were in great grief, “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely, on my account” (v.11). Behind the text, is an imagery of believers of Jesus who are falsely accused. The basis of the faulty accusation is their new-found faith in Jesus and the consequent moral imperatives that came with that same faith, “on account of me” (v.11). These accusations lead to the believers to be persecuted, slandered, and reproached. The assurance of Jesus to these believers is a “reward in heaven” (v.12)—the same reward received by the true prophets of old, who were treated by people of their own time in the same fashion.

### Pursuing Righteousness Despite Persecution

Righteousness is such an important virtue in the beatitudes. Twice, it is mentioned: [1] in (v.6) “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,...” and [2] in (v.10) “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sakes,....”<sup>16</sup>

In v.6 righteousness is an object of the nominal-participle “those who hunger” (*peinōntes*) and “those who thirst” (*dipsōntes*).

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Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967):362.

<sup>15</sup> H. Balz, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol III (Grand Rapids, Michigan:1993—reprint 1994), p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Allan Powell, “Matthew’s Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom” *CBQ* vol. 58, no. 4 (1996): 461-462. Proposes a two-stanza division of the beatitudes, in line with other authors he mentioned in his footnotes like, Robert Grundy, Jan Lambrecht, John P. Meier et al. He also notes that this two-stanza division is marked by a parallelism of the term *dikaioσunē* in both apodosis (vv. 6 and 10).

Interestingly, these two verbs are indicative of the basic necessities of life. Each day, every person has to search for food to eat and seek water to drink so as to live. Righteousness, the object of two nominal-participles, is presented as a daily preoccupation, a constant endeavor, a necessity to achieve, and a continuing pursuit. It is a basic necessity for the soul and conscience of believers to achieve the blessedness required by Jesus, the authoritative teacher exceeding all teachers of his time.

Just what is this righteousness that has to be sought by the believers of the Matthean community? Mark Allan Powell mentions two possible interpretations of righteousness both of which have subscribing experts. The first is a righteousness that has emphasis on “people who long to live according to God’s will” and the second, “has reference to the activity of God that establishes Justice.”<sup>17</sup>

From the use and appearance of the word “righteousness” within the beatitudes, one may surmise that righteousness refers more to the people’s longing to live Jesus’ demand to be *makarios* or to live God’s will, rather than God’s activity on the person.

Verses 7 and 9 of the beatitudes refer to two very important values specifically for the Christians of Matthean community who are objects of scorn, hatred, and persecution or who are mourning on account of their faith. Verse 7 talks of being merciful so as to receive mercy from his God, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (v.7). Verse 9 talks of being a peacemaker in order to be called children of God, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (v.10). Significantly, v. 8, which is at the center of these two values, merciful (v.7) and being peacemaker (v.9), talks about the necessity to have a “pure of heart” (v.8) in order to see God, “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God.”

From the rhetorical structure of Matthew, Righteousness first consists in the continuous and non relenting pursuit to have a pure heart. Purity of heart, which allows one to see God face to face, is the fundamental righteousness. From a righteousness that spring from the purity of heart, flows other values foremost of which in the context of the Matthean community is to be merciful and to become peacemakers.

These very important values are no simple attributes but are to become identification markers. Identity of the believers despite the circumstances surrounding or hounding them i.e. in spite of the

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid. p 467-468.

persecution, maltreatment, segregation and marginalization they were going through. Only by these values becoming second nature to them, by continuously pursuing them as though the basic necessities of life i.e. bread and water, will they be considered “blessed” (*makarioi*).

## Kingdom of Heaven and the Blessed

Up to this point, the focus of the article has been on identifying who the poor and how the dative “in spirit” modified the concept of the poor. The poor ones in spirit refer to the Matthean community believers who were under persecution and in conflict with (probably) Judaism of their time. They were in crisis as to their identity: an outsider to Judaism and not accepted by the greater populace. On account of their faith, they are maltreated, marginalized, and scorned. Yet, they are to pursue righteousness, foremost of which is to have a pure heart in their relations within the community and also to those who are non members of their community. They have to be merciful and become peacemakers. In doing so, they are the blessed. And this blessedness is not an ordinary characteristic but has to become second nature to them, it is to be their identity marker. It is what separates them from the rest of the people of their time.

### Kingdom of Heaven: The Reason for Pursuing Righteousness

The term “kingdom of heaven” appears twice in the beatitudes v. 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”; and v. 10. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’s sakes, for there is the kingdom of heaven.” In both instances it is in a dependent clause or the apodosis to both protasis, οἱ τὰ αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν\

This apodosis is introduced by a subordinate conjunction *hoti* expressing either cause or result clause. In relation to the dominant idea of vv.3 & 10 i.e the blessed ones or the poor in spirit, despite the persecution, are to pursue purity of heart. If they do so, kingdom of heaven belongs to them. In this way, the “Kingdom of heaven is presented as reason or meaning<sup>18</sup> for pursuing righteousness. In times of difficulties

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<sup>18</sup>F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans by. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961): 238.

and crisis the “kingdom of heaven” is the only reason for existence, it is that which gives meaning to a life of faith, it is the reward for a life of the purity of heart. Robert Foster underscores the point when he says, “Kingdom of Heaven affirmed the disciples’ allegiance both to Jesus as the Christ and to his teaching which truly revealed the righteousness of God.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Kingdom of Heaven: A Life Paradigm**

In a way the kingdom of heaven is a life paradigm for the members of the Matthean community. To these believers, under persecution, Jesus proposes to them a life style marked by righteousness first expressed in purity of heart and is manifest in meekness, forgiveness, living a life of mercy and being a peace-advocate. It’s an identity of the community or a pattern of behavior from which the relationship between Jesus and the believers is established.

At the opening of the ministry of Jesus, he proposed this kind of life style, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (4:17).

### **Final Words: Kingdom of Heaven as Hope for the Reversal of Present Life Situation**

One can likewise not discount, that the same “kingdom of heaven” is a reason for poor ones to hope for the reversal of their present despicable situations. Those who have nothing and have no one to depend on for a better life expects the promise of the kingdom of heaven to change their life circumstances both in the here-and now and in the life to come. The meek ones of v.4 may also be taken to be identical with the poor in spirit. In the context of the beatitudes, the meek who are members of the Matthean community are those who seek out for righteousness and are under persecution. To these meek who pursue righteousness despite persecution the promise of Jesus is to “inherit” the earth. Inheriting “connotes not a reward that one must earn but a gift for which one must only wait.”<sup>20</sup> To these the kingdom of heaven is a promise of hope for the reversal of their life situation here on earth.

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<sup>19</sup>Robert Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven’?: Matthew’s Terminology Revisited,” *New Test. Stud.* Vol 48, no. 4 (2002): 489.

<sup>20</sup>Powell, “Matthew’s Beatitudes...”: 467.



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