

# The Feminine Maternal Dimension in Kolbe's Personality and Writings

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## 1. The Knight of the Immaculate

Those learning about this out of the ordinary saint are struck by his love for the Immaculate. It is the love for the Mother of God yet also – from a woman's point of view – the unconditional dedication of a man to a woman, who inasmuch as invisible yet present in thought and soul, has something extraordinary and fascinating. As in all saints already living "as angels in heaven", in Kolbe we can find feminine and masculine traits that harmonize and coexist, bringing out the characteristics first of one then of the other dimension, so as to confer completeness and breadth of exceptional human maturity to the person. What is of value for Mary and Jesus in the first place, inasmuch as new woman and man recompose the best qualities of each, also is of value for each person. Therefore Paul writes: «There will be neither...male nor female...».

Looking at Kolbe's personality one can see that, within the fundamental sentiment of equality the Apostle speaks about, an asymmetry is delineated incited by love, inscribed more in the heart than in statutes, rules, institutions. Kolbe gives form to this asymmetry between man and the Woman, recollecting to a classic male figure that of the "knight" (John Paul II believes this coincides with the Polish people), a fascinating figure of a well-built man, bursting with health, placing himself freely at the service of a woman, standing next to her not to obtain her favors, being helped in carrying out his commitments and his life easier (doesn't one usually tell the bachelor to marry because otherwise: "Who will provide for your needs?", "Who will take care of you in old age?"), but to stand close to her, help her, give her his resources, protect her in case of need while being under her protection at the same time, in a completely spiritual and sentimental relationship. For Kolbe, as opposed to humanly conceivable relationships between man and woman, this does not only mean placing at her disposal one's strength, one's means, one's time; the "knight of the Immaculate" wishes above all to be completely modeled by Her will, so that "She and not he will do what she will".

In the ideal type of *Knight* the model of the relationship between man and woman is implicitly based not upon interest or laws, or hierarchies, but upon free, caring and faithful love. The man does not present himself as the leader but as the companion, he intervenes if need be, placing his forces at his lady's service. For a knight a woman is always a queen, thus for Kolbe Mary is "Queen of Heaven", "Queen of Angels", "Lady of the heart". The knight's language is a language of praise for his lady and of modesty, force and sweetness; at times he takes on a military swagger and other times a nuptial inflection, at times the impetus of the wind other times the light murmuring of a breeze. Today, the words of this other-worldly knight may seem out of tune, when the correct care to respecting the dignity of every human being badly supports words that include echoes of class differences or diminishing a person to an object, *sicut res et proprietas*. Evidently, Kolbe is at another level when he speaks about consecration as the availability to become "absolute possession" of the Immaculate and when, in the short page of the statute of the foundation, his first condition is: "total consecration to the M. B. V. Immaculata... as 'instruments' in her immaculate hands". One shouldn't trip over a banana peel, trapped by the limitations of language.

In a knight's language of love, just as in the language of any lover, saying "your servant" is normal, as can be read at the end of any love letter historical documentation is full of. The word "possession", which sounds invalidated by the fear of being reduced to a manipulated and exploited object, in Kolbe's language takes on the meaning of giving oneself to someone trustworthy, more than oneself, as can be seen in the use he makes of the same word concerning Mary's relation with God. For a man in love such as Kolbe, everything one can give to the Virgin is nothing compared to what is received from Her, in a mysterious exchange where the smaller entrusts oneself to the greater, knowing that there is everything to be gained. The knight does not expect any reward for the gift he makes of himself, satisfied by loving for the simple fact that he cannot feel otherwise. Also, Kolbe willingly accepts every labor, but he knows that sooner or later he will receive a great reward in heaven, where he is expected. Thus, when Alphonse dies, who had worked so long with his brother, Kolbe, learning about the news while in Japan, writes a letter to his mother Mary in Krakow: «Dear mother, the Immaculate took him with Her... Therefore we can but be jealous of him; he lived, suffered, worked and consumed himself for the Immaculate, and She gathered him up during the preparation for Her feast day. Soon, we too shall follow him, since we only live to reach Paradise». For this reason, Kolbe did not accept the formulas such as "servant of Mary", "servant of the Immaculate", which could suggest the idea of a reward the servant works towards. It is also typical for the knight to be willing to risk his life and to die for his lady, generously shedding his blood without complaint, instead feeling fortunate in being able to do this, to being admitted to this privilege.

Especially when confronted with the crudeness and vulgarity relations between man and woman are oriented to by a contemporary culture lacking poetry and coming through the mass media, one is struck by the refined soul of St. Maximilian. The feelings are comprehensible only in the light of the surge of love that seems to miraculously rain from heaven on a man so taken by Mary in the vortex of paradise. Such a radical Marian charisma could but come from heaven, since the fear of sentimentalism that blinds triumphant Christocentrism could have certainly made it look like a residue of childishness. Of course, Kolbe suffered from misunderstandings in life, at times denigrated and ridiculed, being considered a sentimental, romantic and deviant fanatic. Personally, that the Virgin's tactic was that "Calvary precedes Tabor" was very clear to him.

To dissipate all perplexities, Kolbe's personality stands out, with the fascination he wielded over his contemporaries, from his psychic equilibrium, intelligence, the strength together with the sweetness that characterized him. We could never think of him as a person capable of stepping on his own dignity, since a certain pride never made him seem servile and his creative dynamism conferred youthful exuberance. The delicacy and the traits of his Marian charisma did not in any way touch the strength of this man of action, capable of cultivating genial projects and achieving them in the best way. This greatness is balanced by a marvelous reserve. In this Kolbe was like Mary, hidden not only from the world, but also from the Evangelists, the Fathers of the Church, the Church herself, as Kolbe notes.

As a knight, Kolbe does his utmost to exalt the lady of his heart to the world and to those in the Church who fear Her greatness. Then, and today also, the worry that Mary's feminine fascination could veil the centrality of Christ to the point of almost substituting Her in the people's hearts was widespread. To Kolbe, it was impossible that Mary contends Her Son's glory and that a son – and that son – could feel diminished by

the love his brothers could nurture for His mother. Looking at it from the same point of view as Jesus, he is not afraid of honoring the person the Master wishes to be honored. Only thus can the human logic of contending be substituted by the race of mutual praise.

Alongside the knight figure, in Kolbe we can see the maternal figure of Mary, re-proposed in a creative and personal way. He relived this, in fact, through an attention rich in sweetness for Her sons, even if with authority and suffering: «Without sacrifice there is no love»: «We do not want to continuously feel the sweetness of devotion to the Immaculate because this would be spiritual selfishness. Let us allow Her to lead us as She pleases and not as we wish. It is not always the right time for sweet tenderness, even if these are holy things. We also need asperities, abandonment, trials».

To come into contact with God, we must become similar to Christ, reproduce on ourselves the reality of the Son of God, transform ourselves into Him, acquire that covering that allows us to become part of the nuptial feast. The covering that makes the human being *alter Christus* is Mary who sews it, alters it to size, puts it on. It is up to Her, in harmony with the Holy Spirit, to give birth to Jesus within the hearts, according to the words of the Master at Nicodemus. For Kolbe, the love that returns from the creatures to the Creator is regenerated by Mary who purifies it from the pollution of sin and offers it up to Christ. Mary's motherhood is expressed in certain Biblical metaphors, such as the one about milk: «She will make you similar to Herself, She will make you evermore immaculate, She will nourish you with the milk of Her grace Just let Her guide you, let yourself be modeled evermore freely by Her». The duty of motherhood is extended to all, to the point where one becomes capable of generating Jesus and thereby becoming another Mary. As every founder, Kolbe strongly feels this paternal/maternal dimension of love, calling "sons" those who adhere to the militia, as "my first son in a non-Christian land" with reference to the Japanese. He felt that he was receiving the motherly gift of the Immaculate, therefore with assuredness: «Paradise is nearing... My sons, I say this to all together and to each one in particular in His name – note this well, in His name – She loves each one of you, She loves you dearly and all the time without any exceptions. This, my dearest sons, I repeat in His Name».

## 2. Beyond reason

Father Kolbe reinforces the conviction of those like me, used to the instruments of science, to attention on sources, to verifications, to data, have learned to *recognize the limitations of reason and of science*. We know that reason has its limitations in the explanatory premise, limits that history has made evident, among which the diminishing of the person to a concept or to a part, the inability to grasp the most intimate and profound transcendental dimension of the human being, the instrumental use, elitism that restricts glory to the "genii". The fact that Christianity offers salvation to all makes the difference: «Each saint is a great man, but not every great man is at the same time a saint [...]. The genius and the saint have many characteristics in common [...] however there is a substantial difference between a saint and a genius that does not tend towards holiness. The genius' dream is the glory of his person, the saint instead has only the glory of God before his eyes».

We have learnt a great deal from S. Weil – and before that from Vico – to learn that what is truly great has to do with truth cannot be understood by intelligence, as if it were its product. Simone Weil believed instead that reason could only make an inventory of what exists. The human being can produce things inferior to him or clone

himself; not that being his life depends on. Even Kolbe, while loving science and from his youth had manifested a special aptitude towards the careful observation of nature's phenomena, had understood that what is really worth offering one's life for must go beyond reason, come from above, like a gift to be welcomed. In the light of this, certain expressions difficult to understand outside of that love without reason that consumed his life until the end (and *not only* till the end) should be read.

Inevitably, his expressions of consecration to Mary create some fear in those who analyze the words from the metaphysical objective point of view, fearing a re-dimensioning of Christocentrism or a slowing down in ecumenical impetus. *Kolbe frankly declares that Mary is a gift that can be asked for only on one's knees.* Therefore: «Thos incapable of bending their knees and implore Mary, in a humble prayer, for the grace of knowing who She really is, should not hope to learn something more about Her». Therefore, he freely places himself outside of the worrisome problems of a theology and a Mariology occupied in establishing the exact roles and status of each one in the heavenly sphere. Those who see in Mary a threat to Jesus reason with a human measurement. They do their utmost to remind us on any occasion that She comes "after", "under", "in the shadow of", "subordinated to", "by the merits of", etc... That is to say, they worry about establishing perhaps valid specifications on a dogmatic level, but superfluous and weighty in the field of spirituality. Kolbe did all he could to avoid the cleaver of heterodoxy, but at the same time he did not want to lose what seemed to him the heart of the charisma God had given him and that he had to defend at any price (we know that he even damned those who rowed against his charisma in the City of the Immaculate).

Kolbe could not be quiet about what he truly thought of those fearing consecration to Mary: They are playing Satan's game, taken up without even knowing by pride in not wanting to recognize the "great things" that God wanted to do for and with a humble lad from Nazareth. From the refusal of some angels with Lucifer at their lead to homage their girl-lady, infernal hate against Mary was born, transferred to men in the earthly Paradise and spread even today among Christians. Each excessive criticism against Mary is rebutted by the simple statement that all in Her is a living echo of God, for the perfect identification of Her will with the Divine.

The question must be faced changing level from the that of intelligence to that of love and in particular "the folly of love", in a certain sense closer to feminine sensitivity and contemporary feminism, because it emphasizes the overthrow of rationality, per se traditionally "masculine", not to replace it with the Freudian unconsciousness, with Nietzsche's superman or Kierkegarde's anguish, but simply with the living relation between people, lived as a significant contact: «When you begin to read something about the Immaculate, do not forget that in that moment you are entering in contact with a living being, who loves you, pure, without blemish». From the theological point of view, it is clear that this personal and relational path towards truth can be linked to the thinking of Duns Scott, concerning Incarnation and freedom, rather than that of Thomas of Aquinas. Perhaps Kolbe realizes his stronger ties with the Scottist tradition and calls upon his brother Duns Scott to speak to Mary in the best way possible. Like Scott, Kolbe places the source of all created things not so much in intelligent rationality as in the free love of God. This not an invitation to irrationality or to giving in to aphasia, but recognizing the difference between human reason and Divine truth and asking God for the light to try to even stutter the inexpressible. This impotency of reason finds the way to realize an impossible unity with reason through creative love.

From the student's point of view, it is interesting to see the *ability to interpret the relation between truth and life in a personal and original way* in Fr. Kolbe, a characteristic that can be found in great souls and that is also a personal trait of the feminine approach to the world. The simplicity with which he interprets the ancient words of faith in the middle of the complexity and atrocity of situations is surprising, such as when he repeats in Oswiecim the phrase from catechism that states that "God is everywhere", giving it special meaning. In fact, he writes to his mother, two months before being killed in the bunker: «My beloved mother! Towards the end of May, I arrived in the Auschwitz (Oswiecim) camp by train. Everything is fine here. Dearest Mother, do not worry about me or about my health because the good Lord is everywhere and with great love thinks about everyone and everything. It would be better for you to wait until you receive another letter from me before writing because I do not know how long I will be staying here. A cordial embrace and kisses».

Another feminine trait – as well as universal – is the *ability to live without contrasts between the mystical and realistic dimensions of existence*. On one hand, Kolbe lives completely dedicated to his heavenly queen and on the other, he has the eye, the ear, the sense of looking for the right times and men for the cities to be, to deal with buying land and machinery, to understand how much power the mass media have, to take care of the concrete and worrisome and difficult problems in a foundation, reasoning like a manager, since, as he put it: "My gaze is constantly attracted towards new horizons". Even this ability to look at reality with the double perspective, thus uniting Socrates to Machiavelli, brings him closer to that feminine trait, which on one side is always attentive to concrete life taking care of the house, the bills, the sick and on the other needing to turn one's thoughts, soul, at times fantasy, beyond the limited boundaries of the world, making a hole in the blanket that separates the visible from the invisible reality.

For Kolbe, everything takes place in a sort of convergence between two registers, one that sees the earthly things and the other the heavenly ones, one in the perspective of men and the other in that of Mary, made of grace. Attention, contemplation, discernment lie between the two perspectives. Kolbe is convinced that all, even the most lost person in the world, is given the possibility to interact in every day life with the invisible God through Mary: «She urges the sons that love her to collaborate with Her in situations of normal everyday life...».

I would also like to point out a trait which seems significant to me, parallel to the feminine sensitivity and contemporary feminism: the *flexibility of the organization of the works* he wishes to achieve, where the internal rigor of consecration is balanced by openness to the exterior according to the Augustinian assertion: «*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*». In the "Cities of the Immaculate", what is striking is Fr. Kolbe's ability to obtain profits from each person's talents, giving value to the specific abilities. Once having pinpointed the fundamental objective, he believed it was opportune to have the right organization capable of measuring up to the variety of situations and to find the most correct and efficient means without limitations.

### 3. Aggressive Evangelization

As a Catholic I am struck by Fr. Kolbe's understanding of Christianity, who certainly didn't stay in the rear lines, not the sort to limit himself to doing his duty and defensively fighting. He felt more clearly than others the *urgent need for aggressive*

*evangelization*, connecting with the world of contemporary culture beginning with the mass media, finding the evil where it sticks and fighting it with the most efficient means. For Fr. Kolbe, educated in a seminary in Rome according to the style of a defensive apologetics towards Protestant theology and illuminist rationalism, this was not a question of retorting other arguments, but winning over by convincing the hearts through witness, prayer, and forthrightness. In fact, he had a rather war-like character, understanding that the law down here is a war of power. One cannot act efficiently without organizing a "militia", capable of fighting in another way and with a special leader. Kolbe had assimilated all the warlike terms (militia, knight, strategy, attack, tactic, trench, forefront, first and second lines, offense, defense, bullets, references to medals, artillery) during his childhood, with his attraction to the military career. As an adult, he confirms that life is a battle, a fight between the world's logic and the Immaculate's logic. He was not a warlike person, but the sufferings of his family had taught him that living is not a game, the conflicts between powers abandon the weakest to needs and he was convinced that only by fighting for the Immaculate could one be sure of having placed his heart securely away from the temptation of dominion. His youthful passion for military structures was turned to the advantage of weaving subtle and winning strategies against Satan and his thousands of tentacles. For Kolbe, the first thing was to know the beast «studying contemporaneously the anti-religious movements of our times, their sources, their methods, the effects, etc... distinguishing the good and the bad in these movements. There is no better way to uproot a bad movement than to know what it holds as good to apply it to our cause».

If one looks at life as a "battlefield", it would be naïve to ignore the possibility of death. This is why Kolbe asks his followers to "go towards death".

However, one should take note that for Kolbe "going towards death" was a daily action, not limited to a specific event. At the end, he died for a companion, one we do not know much about, because the habit of dying daily had prepared him. Simone Weil's comment is correct here: «To die for God does not bear witness to faith in God. To die for an unknown and repugnant criminal subjected to injustice, this is bearing witness to God. This is what Christ wanted to make us understand: "I was naked... I was hungry..."... Thus when a man gives a piece of bread in a certain way to one of the less fortunate, or speaks about a losing army in a certain way, I know that his thoughts came from the world and he sat, with Christ, next to the Father who is in heaven»

Mary appears to Kolbe as a leader guiding an army and not as a humble and servile woman, capable always and only of adapting to what others decide for Her. "To serve is to reign", is true, but one can serve by leading an army or by obeying. Mary does both in different situations, but we should not forget to place the leader over the servant. Therefore, Kolbe is dealing with a new, assertive and bellicose model of femininity, who does not fear exposing herself, to take on, to say what she wishes, even when she knows she will lose her life.

Another possibly trait that could be of interest to the sensitivities of contemporary Catholic women is the *knowledgeable equilibrium with the ecclesial institution*. When necessary, Kolbe willingly obeyed while faithfully maintaining, however, the orientation towards what the Immaculate suggested to his soul, avoiding that the "priest kill the prophet". Like all founders, he had to fight to defend his charisma from attacks not only external but also from within the Church, since his "dynamic" interpretation of religion (as Bergson said) would knock against the more "static" one of those trying to diminish the life of the Spirit within a juridical dimension, identifying unity with

uniformity. Kolbe understood that this battle was on the cultural level and needed to be fought on that level. Criticism from his brothers offended him, but even more so the indifference, the laziness, the hardness of so many Christians. The offensive he wished to launch was essentially a spurt of love and pureness in the world. The *Kulturkampf* wasn't only the plan for Germanization nurtured by Protestantism and promoted by Prussia in the Western area of Poland, truthfully without much luck, but something more universal concerning the insidiousness of the serpent to the Immaculate, who however has the certitude of final victory.

He did not live opposition to the institutions, which he had to account to, civil and ecclesial in a frontal and irreconcilable way. He knew how to avoid the clash thanks to the worth he gave to dynamic and creative obedience.

The list of accusation against Father Kolbe revolved around Mary. First of all, the universal mediation of Mary was criticized, not accepted by many of the members of the Franciscan Order and by theologians, but that Kolbe believed to be the characterizing element of the Marian spirituality of the Militia. Then there was the problem with the laity, who had too much space in the Cities of the Immaculate touching upon the traditional juridical norms (we know that from the beginning he organized study circles, "hearths" made up of students, friars and lay groups, to the point of inciting perplexity regarding this movement that seemed to corrupt the conventual silence). Then there was the accusation of rigor in the area of poverty (what is striking is the extreme poverty of life of the brothers in contrast with the necessary and "most modern" machinery for the press, as Kolbe wanted them) and of unlimited obedience, which made the militians transfer to whichever land of mission they were sent to. To this, add the upset and the division that a new reality brought to the Franciscan Order. Finally, Kolbe would not accept criticism concerning re-dimensioning his dedication to Mary. Diminishing the excess of love for the Virgin equaling it to that of other orders – as he was advised to avoid problems – was the same as denying the specificity of the Militia and thereby extinguish a charisma.

Just like the fracture between laity and Catholicism, a spirit like Kolbe's cannot be taken in by the rupture between living and theology, so frequent in Catholic circles. He realized that the Church was going through a difficult period, with the risk of being closed in a ghetto of conservatorism and preferred to launch an attack, being present in the press world and train Catholics capable of withstanding the confrontation. Kolbe knew what to call these enemies of Christianity, without refusing to utter it; as the Christians who prefer to come to an agreement and adapt to the worldly powers trying to reconcile the Gospel with power, still timidly do today. Therefore, he clearly denounced the Masonic Mafia. He lucidly saw the world spider web weaved by the masonry and directed against the supernatural by diminishing customs and by using the press, the cinema, radio and theater, using all the evident and latent means capable of supporting capitalism or communism. Kolbe registered the association between the masonry, finance, the "Jewish clan", Socialism in Bolshevik Russia.

*A third rupture was insupportable to Kolbe: the one between faith and science, between theology on the defensive and science on the offense, between a conservative diffidence and brilliant results that spoke for themselves and called out the need of being used for the Kingdom of God, which appeared to him as the Kingdom of Mary. But his love for science never urged him beyond the limitations. That is why he said: "science fills up, it is useful only as it helps love". He did not ask it for what it could not give, rather he was diffident of the temptation of pride, which satiates results and*

deafens the highest values. His method of operating was the demonstration of the possibility of recomposing laity and Catholicism, science and faith, the lived and doctrine, paths he opened leaving the duty of final contributions to the Militia.

#### 4. Reciprocity in God and the Theo-anthropological one in Mary

A second reflection connected to the first touches upon **theology**, at least within the limits in which one can say that a Christian is a *naturaliter* theologian. From this point of view, I believe the part of Kolbe's thinking that applies the same simple law that presides on the mechanisms of physics to things of the Spirit is of particular significance: "to every action, an equal or contrary reaction corresponds". He mentions this for the first time in 1939: «Every action in view of a reaction. The reaction is the fruit of an action». There are actions and reactions on earth, in heaven and between heaven and earth. An agent begins an action and another receives it, but at a certain point is called upon to return it in his own way; there is a speaker and listener who, at a certain point, in turn, answers; there is a fullness and a void, which at a certain point fills up... In other words, it seems that within this dynamic, Kolbe grasps the law of reciprocity, which was included in the *Evangelium Vitae* and which on the human level delineates itself as the ideal for interpersonal relations. This is a universal law to him, in other words not only concerning the cosmos and in particular interpersonal relations, not only relative to the action of God towards the world, but within the Trinity itself. It is a sort of dialect of love composed by the dual motion of flux and reflex, descent and ascent, proposal and response, schism and unity. The simple scheme action-reaction is useful to Kolbe to emphasize the Divine historical initiative of salvation and the human Theo-anthropological response, towards a dialogic communion between the Creator and the creature, united in the covenant by the mediation of Christ.

In the same way, any division is achieved in view of new unification. This is always love in motion, creative love. The action-reaction law explains the destiny of every human being: «The finality of every man is to belong to God through Jesus, Mediator with the Father, and to belong to Jesus through the Mediatrix of all graces, the Immaculate». Just as the gift comes from above, the return comes from below, free restitution, according to an personalistic viewpoint, where by person one refers to the gift of self, distinguishing it from other more often used words in the philosophical disciplines such as "subject", "I", "conscience", "humanity". In reality, Kolbe more often uses the word "man", but giving it the same relational and gift-like meaning which is usually given to "person": «Only man (not always, not in everything) reciprocates this love in an imperfect way... with love».

Creation seems to him a separation that generates the desire to join up again, in a vital dialectic that has in love the spring that moves the kenotic process of God's descent in Creation as well as the ascetic one of return in a path of resemblance with God.

Within this universal dynamic, Kolbe places Mary as the focal point, the juncture thanks to which creation returns to the Creator, in answer to the movement of descent with which God relates through His Son the Mediator. Creation seen through the filter of Mary appears to Kolbe as an ensemble of acts of love that from the creatures rise towards God in a reaction of love of creation, and the Immaculate represents its apex. The created and the un-created meet in a union that equalizes what, in itself, is infinitely distant. Love from all of Creation returns to God through Mary, even when the souls call upon the Father, Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Kolbe demands the freedom of



the souls to call upon the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, to Mary, without upsetting the hierarchies and creating jealousies among the inhabitants of the Olympus.

Speaking about the routes correspondence takes towards Grace, he writes *en passant*: «through the Holy Spirit and the Son, this means through the Immaculate, the Bride of the Holy Spirit and Jesus united hypostatically to the nature of the Son». Mary appears to Kolbe as a Mediatrix not only of the Graces explicitly requested of Her, but of every gift that rains from the heavens onto earth. In fact, he writes that the volumes that could be filled with Graces that come from the Immaculate «would only count what these souls might have recognized as special graces from the Immaculate, while every grace reaches the soul from the hands of the Mediatrix of all graces».

Jesus may realize in Mary all the follies of love because He is God and does not need to hide, to become small; to obey and make great the loved one, as is proper to the illogical logic of every person in love. While we “are evil”, to say it in the words of Jesus and He cannot allow Himself to follow us, because He cannot sin, with Mary instead He can allow Himself the liberty of obeying, passing through Her to reach us, to welcome us through Her to insert us in His love, because the will of Mary is identified with that of God, in a circuit of love where each one lives the law of love and is therefore dead to his own will to live in reciprocity.

Within the horizons of reciprocity the happy *coincidentia oppositorum*, which once again dethrones reason and evokes the Trinitarian lifestyle, is no longer a problem. Mary is, par excellence, this exalting personification of what may seem contradictory to reason: «In the annunciation, we see Her as sublime and at the same time very humble, Lady and Servant, Mother of God and at the same time Man». In Her, the linear beginning of causality short circuits: “Mary was Immaculate because She had to be the Mother of God and She is the Mother of God because She is Immaculate”.

Inspiration leads Kolbe to delineate the truths about Mary, while knowing that they will be accepted with difficulty from the viewpoint of a jealous Christocentricity of the primacy of Christ, but that are natural for the loving soul, who sees no scandal in the fact that God, in His kenosis, continues to become small in Mary and plays with raising Her almost above Himself. Reciprocity is what demands this alternation between kenosis and glorification.

Kolbe links the Immaculate to the Holy Spirit defining Her as: «the Holy Spirit in some way made flesh». Of course, he takes care to save the dogmatic point of view about the difference in nature: «Of Herself She is nothing, just like the other creatures, but by the work of God She is the most perfect among creatures. The most perfect resemblance to the Divine Being in a purely human creature». But, saving the doctrine, he takes the liberty to fly high in the area of gratuity where to him the will of God resides over Mary: «There are two natures in Jesus (the Divine and the human) and one person only (the Divine), while there are two natures and two persons here, the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate, the union of divinity with humanity goes beyond any comprehension».

It is his deep conviction that the Spirit works in union and in collaboration with Mary, which also encounters opposition from those pointing out that God does not need anyone to operate. Yet in the illogical logic, in other words in the folly of love, God wants to need every creature, He puts Himself in the position of depending on Mary, whose assent He asks for the Incarnation. In fact, He becomes the «beggar» for love, as S. Weil says. In the secret nuptial room things can be murmured without the need for verification, where Father Kolbe learns about and from Mary the inexpressible truths. In

this dimension the greatness and the smallness of Mary may coexist, regality and service, divinity and humanity.

In looking at the attributes Kolbe acknowledges to Mary, they are right for the children of God, in the light of Incarnation. For example, he supports the resemblance of Mary to God, but also clarifies: «everything existing outside of God, because it comes from God, totally and under any aspects from God, bears resemblance to the Creator, and in Creation everything bears this resemblance... could the Conception perhaps be an exception? This is impossible because in this field there are no exceptions...».

Searching for the specificity of Mary, Kolbe does not stop at the “feminine” stereotypes of tender and maternal love, of mercy and welcome, but turns to the relation with the Holy Spirit: «And who is the Spirit? He is the fruit of the love of the Father and of the Son. Fruit of created love is a created concept. Therefore, the fruit of love, the prototype of this created love is none other than a concept. Therefore, the Spirit is an eternal uncreated concept, He is the prototype of any concept of life in the universe». Mary, being full of love, «the name of the Holy Spirit, “Immaculate Conception”, is the name of She in whom He lives of a love that is fruitful within all supernatural economy».

The *fascinans et tremendum* of Kolbe’s teachings about Mary lie in the meditation on the Immaculate Conception, considered the attribute that «belongs only to Her... by right... and as a consequence of this, is truly the name that defines Her in an essential way». «This name contains many other mysteries that will be revealed in time». Kolbe notes that the Virgin of Lourdes does not say “I have been conceived without sin”, but: “I am the Immaculate Conception”, that is to say She uses an abstract expression that alludes to some absolute comparable to the definition God gives of Himself to Moses: “I am who I am” (*Ex* 3:14). In fact: «one is a white object and other is His whiteness, one is the perfect object and the other His perfection». Just as only God can be the eternal being beyond attributes, without any kind of limitations, so Mary has an absolute attribute that distinguishes Her from men, from angels and from God: «She is “conceived”, therefore not God who has no beginning, nor an angel created directly by God, nor the first parents who did not receive their existence through conception». The distinction with Christ recalls once again the different nature: «Even Jesus Christ, Man-God, began His existence by conception. However, He was a “conceived”, rather than the conception itself, since being God, the Son of God already existed throughout all eternity».

A special tie with God is delineated, which inserts Mary in the initial project of Creation as a creature per se. In the logic of reciprocity one could say that God became man and the human being in Mary was made Divine. Also, don’t the Scriptures announce: “You will be gods”?

Only in the illogical logic of love can such a prophecy make sense, since, from the rational ontological viewpoint, if a creature cannot be God, if one is A at the same time he cannot be not A. «The finality of Creation, the finality of man is the love of God, Creator and Father, an ever greater love, divinization, the return to God from where he issued, union with God, fruitful love». Mary can realize in us the finality of Creation if we identify ourselves in Her «the most perfect resemblance of the Divine Being in a purely human creature». Because of this, Kolbe thanks the Trinity in the following way: «I adore you, o Most Holy Trinity... for having elevated the Immaculate in such a Divine way»

In Father Kolbe this is not metaphysical theology, it is a mystical letter of the kenosis of God for love in woman's motherhood, "born of woman". Mary is the pure gift of God, without any necessity. God incites, through His creative action, a creature capable of a perfect reaction of love and thereby truly worthy of being the Mother of God and the Bride of the Spirit.

Some interpreters have found, in the last writings, a more prudent formulation on the expressions that created problems, such as the indication of the Virgin as almost an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, or a form of union of the Holy Spirit of the hypostatic type of the Word with Jesus' humanity. These are formulae that appeared ambiguous and were dangerous for Kolbe. Therefore, he would reach the formula of the Immaculate as the earthly and created copy of the Holy Spirit. No matter which way things went, reading the writings and witnesses we reach the conviction that Kolbe was personally not very worried about deviating from the truth. In his soul, he felt that when speaking of Mary he would enter, so to say, into the nuptial mystery of the love of God for His creature and was inebriated, as the Bride's friend, by this enveloping heaven that went beyond any imperfection and every problem.

It is the nuptial dynamic that allows Kolbe to go beyond the metaphysical problem, the deductive logic, the methods and language used in dogmatic theology, to locate himself on a mystical level, within in that folly of love that joins the groom to the bride and makes them one flesh, be they poor and rich or a frog and a princess, like in the fables, or one dead and one living like in Snow White, or a creature and a Creator. Love has its secrets to be able to make of two different persons one flesh. What is said about newlyweds in general also has a mysterious and mystical value even in the relation between Mary and the Spirit, two different natures, uncreated and created, yet unexplainable united in an eternal union. In the nuptial metaphor, Mary represents all of Creation joining the groom once again, Creation liberated from sin and made worthy of true constructive and creative I-you dialogue. In the nuptial logic that unites them one enjoys the good said of the other and certainly does not feel diminished, rather almost like a knight, cedes the best place to Her. Kolbe uses the nuptial analogy in which a wife, according to traditional marital law, takes the husband's name, to defend the attribute of Immaculate Conception that Mary takes from Her groom, the Holy Spirit. «If among creatures, a bride receives the name of the groom because she belongs to him, unites with him, becomes similar to him and, in union with him becomes creative factor of life, how much more the name of the Holy Spirit, "Immaculate Conception" is the name of She in whom He lives a love that is fruitful in all supernatural economy». One understands how Mary may seem to be the "completion of the Trinity" forming with the Three what is often called the quaternity.

Keeping all of this in mind, is it not Kolbe the one who took the word-recommendation of Jesus to John: «Here is your mother» in the most serious way? His "taking her in with him" was not simply giving her a place to live, taking care of her in old age, but much more, an obedient childhood, an entrusting to Her and glorifying Her, recognizing Her as present and operative in the Church and pointing Her out to all as a model.

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