

FRANCISCAN MOTIFS IN THE APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY OF FATHER KOLBE

Father Maximilian M. Kolbe belonged to the family of the Friars Minor Conventual of St. Francis of Assisi. Ever since he was a small child he was part of this family and absorbed its seraphic spirit, full of devotion to the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Passion and the Resurrection of the Lord, to the mystery of the real and substantial presence of the Lord in the Eucharist and to Mary the Mother of God as the Immaculate Conception.

Father Maximilian was a great apostle and man of action: spreading the worship of Our Lady especially through the press media.

In our report, we will deal with the Franciscan motifs that influenced Fr. Maximilian's apostolate.

During his lifetime, Fr. Kolbe was a theologian and a mystic, especially a mystic. His apostolate was influenced by his theology and by his mysticism. The Franciscan theological motifs the guided Fr. Kolbe in his apostolate are of a Christological and Mariological nature.

I. Christological Motifs.

1. *The primacy of Christ.*

Many times, Fr. Kolbe underlined that the finality of the M.I. is to win over all souls to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the Chapel of the International College in Via Teodoro in Rome, where he studied to prepare himself for the priesthood, the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus could be found above the main altar. Jesus indicates that St. Francis of Assisi is among the saints most loved by the Divine Heart to St. Margherita Maria Alacoque. St. Maximilian often looked at this image. We believe that the main inspiration for the framework of the finality of the M.I. must be looked for in this.

The Word made Flesh, the beginning, the center and the end of all creation, guides and directs all of Fr. Kolbe's activities. Fr. Kolbe took the thesis of the primacy of Christ from St. Francis and the Franciscan School of thought. In fact, his thinking should be placed in the current of Franciscan theological thought, continuing and developing the intuitions and leading it to heights never reached before.

1.1. *Dependence on Saint Francis* – Assisi's Saint was not a theologian, a speculative and systematic sort, but a supreme mystic, guided by the gifts of the intellect and wisdom with which the Holy Spirit imbued him, the mutual and ineffable Love of the Father and of the Son in the intimacy of Trinitarian life.

Meditating on the Mystery of Christ, St. Francis was lead to see Him in a rooted and profound way. The Mystery of Christ is seen by the Saint in it's root, which is the Father, from which the Son comes forth, perfect God from perfect God, and in His mission in the world, by the Incarnation, which realizes in a perfect way the return of Creation towards the Father, by the sacrifice of the Cross, culminating in the glory of the Resurrection.

What strikes us and attracts our attention in St. Francis' thought and practice is his insistence in underlining that God is «the good, the entire good, the supreme good». God is Love and this explains His infinite communication *ad intra* and His free yet also supreme communication *ad extra* by the Incarnation.

With perfect theological precision, St. Francis describes the work of salvation to us, which begins with the heavenly Father, who send His only Son to the world to become man. Through Him, His only Son, the Father in the Holy Spirit created all things spiritual and corporal; He made us in His image and placed us in Paradise. For Saint Francis the Incarnation does not have liberation from sin as its primary effect, but our divinization or existence in the Son: «consider, o man, the condition the Lord put you in, since He created you and made you in the image of His beloved Son, according to the body and the *similitude* of His according to the Spirit».

Incarnation was realized through a most holy woman, Mary, who in virtue of Her Motherhood has a unique relation with the Son of God, who became Her Son. Mother and Son are inseparable. Contemplating the Mystery of Incarnation, St. Francis was not only transported by an ineffable love for the Son of God who became our brother, but was also transported by an unspeakable love for Mary, because She made the Lord of Majesty our brother (2 *Cel.* 198, FF. 786).

The Word made Flesh motivated St. Francis' interest for Mary. St. Francis spiritual and Marian life was essentially Christocentric and patrocentric. This is where the implicit mystic intuition concerning Mary's Immaculate Conception in St. Francis' thought stems from. The Saint was led to praising and magnifying the greatness of Mary. Testimonials of this are two beautiful prayers, the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* and the antiphony *Holy Virgin Mary*, in which St. Francis implicitly but equivalently expresses himself on the Virgin's Immaculate Conception. In the Antiphony the Saint recognizes Mary's unique relation with God: «... no one born in the world is similar to you» (FF. 281); in the second, he attributes the fullness of grace and good to Her... «in whom is all fullness of grace and good» (FF. 259). Note how the Saint's thinking is a comment on the Angel's words when saluting Mary *full of grace* and how they conform to the expression of the Church's Marian Tradition, which celebrates the holiness of Mary prevalently in positive terms, shedding light on the fullness of Her truly unique and extraordinary holiness. The connection between the Incarnation and the unique holiness of Mary, Her Immaculate Conception and divine Motherhood will be dominating motifs in the Franciscan School.

The absolute primacy of Christ in Creation and the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Her extraordinary holiness, superior to that of the Blessed, Her universal mediation are the Seraphic of Assisi's own intuitions.

1.2. *Dependence on John Duns Scotus* – The pearl of Scotus' Christology is without a doubt the thesis of the primacy of Christ in the universe.

John Duns Scotus theologially edified the mystical intuition of St. Francis mentioned above. In the prophesied Son incarnating God, he sees all men, angels and all of Creation as stemming from the instrumental nature, the exemplary order, efficient and final. This thesis, already upheld by the great theologians of the XII and XIII Centuries, Duns Scotus made his. His merit was to free it from its hypothetical form to establish it in the *de facto* situation by giving the reason for today's Creation in the eternal foresight of the Word made Flesh, as the end of a divine action coming from the greatest love and destined to the more generalized love». For John Duns Scotus, the universal primacy of Christ was intimately tied to His predestination.

This way of looking at the problem of primacy, starting from predestination, is entirely new. Being a work of God *ad extra*, it is subject to the sovereign freedom therefore it must be absolutely independent from any reality outside of God. The human existence of

the Son of God is wanted by God in itself and therefore independently from any determination by creatures, including the sin of man. For Duns Scotus, the reason God wanted Jesus Christ is the supreme glory of Christ Himself and the hypostatic union as the means to achieve this.

If Christ is directly and immediately wanted for Himself and not as redemption from sin, according to Duns Scotus what is the relationship between Him and creatures? Do these only come after and in view of Him? There are various assertions made by Duns Scotus that take into consideration the primacy of Christ with regards to all creatures. But are these assertions really from Duns Scotus and his disciples?

From studies made by competent persons it would seem that Scotus asserts the primacy of Christ under the aspect of exemplary, efficient and final causality only in an implicit way. Explicitly, Scotus asserts that Jesus Christ is the supreme of God *ad extra*: this implicates that He contains the fullness of the cause function with respect to all the other realities created that participate in it.

Duns Scotus starts from the following theological principle: «First God loves Himself as the Supreme Good; then He loves Himself in others with a disinterested love; He sees that another may love Him more than all the other entities and consequently establishes the Incarnation». The text speaks about the supreme love that Christ has for God with respect to all other entities, but nothing is said about the causal influx that Christ may exercise on the other entities in the order of salvation.

According to the studies made, we may assert that for Scotus Christ's predestination implicitly contains an *ontological* and *causal* primacy over all the predestined.

II. The primacy of Christ in Fr. Kolbe

1. *The existence of the primacy of Christ*

Father Kolbe was a convinced assertor of the absolute and universal primacy of Christ. All his Mariological thinking presupposes this and continuously returns to this as its beginning and end. He did not explicitly or lengthily deal with this because to him, the primacy imposed itself as an absolute, evident beginning, from which all other truths concerning the Divine salvation plan come from.

In the study plan Father Kolbe intended to develop on the Immaculate, one can see how he often notes the following program: God One and Trine – Incarnation of the Son – Divine Motherhood of Mary and Her Immaculate Conception – Angels – men and their divinization in Christ and in Mary – the cosmos and the final eschatology. Father Kolbe followed the theses of various Fathers of the Church, by Alexander of Hales in the Middle Ages and more recently by F. Suarez and even more recently by M. J. Scheeben, according to which the reasons for the defection by a part of the Angels was motivated by the refusal of the Divine Plan for salvation, consisting in the communication of the Trinitarian Life and thereby the eternal salvation of all rational creatures through the mediation of the Word that would be made Flesh, in other words man. The rebellious Angels did not want to accept this plan and recognize the Word made Flesh as their Head and Mediator of their eternal salvation and happiness. Starting from the universal mediation of Christ, Father Kolbe extends this also to Mary, His Mother.

2. *The primacy of Mary*

Father Kolbe searched for the figure of Most Holy Mary all his life, from the viewpoint of the Immaculate Conception, locating it in the two main mysteries of Christian faith: the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Our Saint places the mystery of Mary at the heart of the Christian mystery, having participated in the realization of the Incarnation, the center of the Divine Plan for Salvation. In the «Book Project» that Father Kolbe meant to write on the Immaculate, we find that he places at the basis the principle of the predestination of all creatures in Jesus Christ. The research on the Immaculate starts from the Trinitarian mystery and from the Divine Plan for salvation consisting in the participation in the Trinitarian life by the creatures in Jesus Christ; Immaculate Mary was destined and wanted by God with the same freely given decree concerning Incarnation, because destined to being the Mother of the God-Son and of His mystical Body.

Up to now, we can see how Father Kolbe goes back to the beginning of Duns Scotus' thinking concerning the primacy: the predestination of Christ as model and the reason for the predestination of all others. Christ is at the center of the saving plan: everything originates from God the Father through the Word made Flesh and in Him and in view of Him, with the power of the Holy Spirit, returning to the Beginning without a beginning. With Christ and subordinated to Him. Mary is the Mediatrix of the divine life communicated to the creatures.

Father Kolbe always sees Mary together with Christ, Her Son, united inseparably. He applies the same metaphysical-theological procedure that Duns Scotus applies to the primacy of Christ to Mary. The Doctor asserts: «First God loves Himself as the Supreme Good, then loves Himself in other entities with a disinterested love; He sees that one may love Him more than others and thereby establishes the Incarnation».

Father Kolbe asserts: «God knows Himself, loves, and thus the Father generates the Son and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. God knows His own finite resemblances in the most diverse levels, loves them; some, then, He called to being and thus the creatures were originated. God sees the most perfect, Immaculate (full of grace) and thus Jesus is born, Man-God, Son of God and Son of man. In Her, all the levels of resemblance of the children of God and of men find their beginning, the members of Jesus».

The centrality of the person of Mary is placed in the right context. Already the revelation of Her primary privilege in order of time through Her own self-definition: I am the Immaculate Conception, underlines the centrality of the Figure of Mary in the salvific plan. Mary does not come into being simply because conceived without sin, with the mere possession of grace and divine friendship, but comes into being possessing the fullness of grace and divine friendship. Divine grace is innate in Her so that the fullness of grace is almost identified with Her being. Father Kolbe does not fear bringing close the self-definition of Mary to what God said of Himself on the Sinai (*Ex 3:14*). In revealing His Name, God expresses His absolute transcendence in relation to all other creatures (I am who I am, the essence of the Being, without ontological or space or time limitations) as well as his existential proximity to Israel, to whom He gives Himself. God's self-definition expresses the absolute identity between the subject "I" and the predicate: "am who I am", by which He is the "Being", that is the Essential of the Being, by nature, with out limits, existing by and in and for Himself.

By placing Mary and God's self-definition side by side, Father Kolbe wishes to express the fullness of grace conceded to Mary up to almost identifying with the own being. Undoubtedly, Father Kolbe openly underlines the absolute transcendence of God, that is the infinite superiority of His being in relation to that of Mary and in the context of

the entire creature reality, but at the same time underlines the absolute superiority of Mary's grace, which goes beyond that of all other creatures, except for the human sanctity of Jesus Christ.

Father Kolbe points out that Mary, by Herself, is nothing, but through the work of God, She is the most perfect among creatures, being the most perfect resemblance of the Divine Being in a purely human creature. All that Mary is, She owes completely and solely to God: this is the humility She speaks of in the Magnificat. «The Immaculate Conception belongs, in a certain way, to the essence of the Immaculate. This is why She was "full of grace" and God was with Her always and to the point that She became the Mother of the Son of God».

Developing the creation-salvation plan and following the intuitions of the Seraphic Father Saint Francis and the Blessed Duns Scotus, Father Kolbe asserts that all that was created by God is the fruit of His free, gratuitous and generous love. «Creation is the fruit of love. Jesus Christ is the fruit of God's love for the Blessed Virgin. Every "man-God" is the fruit of God's love for the Blessed Virgin. *Love is everywhere*».

Father Kolbe starts from the Biblical definition of God: «God is love» (1 Jn 4:8). First of all love in Himself, concretized in a communion-community of three Persons equal and consubstantial among each other: the One is Communion, plurality of Persons. Infinite love freely expands outside itself, manifesting itself to the supreme level of the Incarnation, where God is not only man but also the vocation of a simple creature to the Divine Motherhood. To Father Kolbe, there is no necessity outside of God that makes him create and communicate in any way to the creatures. The order of Creation and of salvation depends exclusively upon the generous and gratuitous love of God. «Any act of God's love comes from the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit; creative acts, acts that maintain existence, acts that give life and growth, in the order of nature as well as in the order of grace". Father Kolbe is faithful to the tradition of Franciscanism and its method of theologizing, favoring Duns Scotus in a particular way. His direct dependence on Duns Scotus can be seen in the way of expressing the problem of the primacy of Christ, based on His absolute predestination, which has its solid Biblical foundation in the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians (1:3 et segue) and in the one to the Colossians (1:15 et segue). Father Kolbe notes that Immaculate Mary, depending on Christ Her Son, is the highest manifestation of God's free love. Therefore, Her Son and She are predestined in an absolute way, that is to say, independently of any creature and any relation to sin.

3. Mary's predestination

Father Kolbe places the unconditional and primordial predestination of Mary within this global vision. We will use his words to underline his thinking on this matter: «By creating the Angels (before men) God wanted them to full-consciously and freely give proof that they would always and in everything wish to accomplish His will. He manifested the Mystery of the Incarnation to them and revealed that He would call into being a human entity with a body and a soul and would have raised this creature to the dignity of being the Mother of God, thereby becoming also their queen; they should worship Her as queen. Numerous angelical spirits hailed with joy She who their Creator had decided to raise in such a sublime way and gave homage with humility to their Lady. However, some of them, with Lucifer heading, rebelled and did not want to submit to God's will. In fact, they believed that they were far superior to a flesh and blood human being. Such an act of worship seemed to them as undermining their own dignity; they let themselves be carried away by pride and refused to accomplish the will of God».

Father Maximilian, obviously, goes beyond Duns Scotus and the doctrine of the theologians we mentioned, since what they refer to about Jesus Christ, he extends also to Mary His Mother. The Angels had revealed to them that their salvation, their elevation to participation in Trinitarian life also depended upon Mary's Mediation, who was to be their Mother and Queen. The Angels that remained faithful to the Divine Plan for Salvation also owe this to Mary's Mediation. If this is true, one must say that for Father Kolbe Mary was predestined in an absolute way as Mother of Christ and of the entire Mystical Body. But what does this mean? The Love the Father bears for His Son, foreseeing the Incarnation, also embraces His Mother Mary. The two *uno eodemque decreto* are wanted and loved by God's love, before the existence of any creature. God's love for Mary is highly creative because united to His Son and subordinated to Him is created as the masterpiece of grace. Mary's existence is full of grace, of the presence in Her of the Most Holy Trinity. For Her, salvation is not liberation from the sins committed, but the full divinization of Her person by the Most Holy Trinity.

For Father Kolbe, Mary's predestination is the source of predestination of all Angels and all men. These were all ordained to Christ and to His Mother Mary by God. Turning to Mary, Father Kolbe expresses himself in the following way: «God created the world for you. God also called me into being for you». The material world, men, Angels are all wanted by God in relation to Mary's existence, the Mother of the Word made Flesh. From here stems the greatness and inestimable value of Mary. Just as Jesus Christ as man, because of His dignity and greatness, participates in the most perfect way in Divine perfections and was the first to be predestined and in relation to Him all creatures were predestined, thus Mary too, because of Her dignity as Mother of the Incarnated Word, was allowed to participate more than other creatures in the divine perfections, and also in relation and subordinated to Her, they were predestined to participating in divine life.

Father Kolbe states this marvelous truth in the law of «action and reaction, equal yet opposite, a coming and going, a distancing and a nearing, a division and a unification. However, the division is always for the unification, which is creative. This is nothing but an image of the Most Holy Trinity in the creatures' activities». «This law is achieved in a special way in relations between the Trinity and reasoning creatures. Made by Him for Creation, they return to Him through the natural law received from Him; perfecting themselves and becoming similar to Him, they return to Him with love in a perennial union. This law is achieved in a perfect way in the order of the pure creatures in the Immaculate Mary, who sprung from God full of love, of divinity, without any sign of sin and joined to the Holy Spirit Her spouse, returned to the Trinity in an incomparably most perfect way than all the creatures». The return to God, the equal and contrary reaction, proceeds in the opposite direction from that of Creation. In Creation, this path comes from the Father through the Son and the Spirit, while here, through the Spirit, the Son is incarnate in Her womb and, through Him, love returns to the Father. Father Kolbe underlines how, in this union of the Holy Spirit with Mary, «the Holy Spirit is all the love of the Most Holy Trinity, while Mary is all the love of Creation, thus in this union all uncreated Love is joined created love and we achieve the apex of love». Mary, according to our Author's thinking, in Her person, is the compendium of all the love that Creation can give God; She is the perfection of created love which corresponds fully with the Holy Spirit, which is the mutual Love of the Father and of the Son. Mary in perfection goes beyond all the love the simple creatures can give to God, therefore in the creative-salvific plan She was not wanted before the prevision of sin, but before and thereby independently form this. Undoubtedly, Mary's love, being a creature's love, cannot be compared to the love that Her Divine Son with His human heart is able to give and express to God the Trinity in the name of all of Creation, but after that of Her Son, Her love for the Holy Spirit and thereby for the Trinity is the most perfect of all of Creation and consequently

Her person must be freely predestined by God together and subordinately to the Son, first and above all of Creation. God created reasoning beings out of love and to be loved by them in turn; the apex of this love is Mary and therefore all creatures were wanted and loved by God in relation to Mary, who subordinately to Her Son is the center and the end of Creation.

If Mary, subordinated to Christ, is the apex of Creation, Her redemption through the work of Christ will consist in being excluded from the law of bearing original sin. If God predestined Christ before all other creatures, He had to predestine the woman who was to be His mother before all creatures as well. Predestining Her this way, He necessarily excluded Her from bearing original sin. *Uno eodemque decreto* is asserted in Pius IX Papal Bull "Ineffabilis Deus", the Son and the Mother wanted by God. Mary's sanctity does not depend on Her inclusion in the law that regulates the transmission of original justice or, in the opposite case, original sin, but rather depends on Her predestination with Christ. Christ's death and resurrection are the inexhaustible source of Mary's grace, the Angels' and for all men's as sinners in Adam. Christ's sacrifice earned Mary the fullness of grace, which includes Her Immaculate Conception and Her perennial union with God, while earning and expiating the sins of all of humanity. Thus, the sacrifice of the Cross is the source of any merit and any predestination and salvation but in different ways, for Mary and for the good Angels on one hand, and for all of men on the other.

III. Mariological motifs

1. *The Immaculate Conception*

We have already mentioned the Immaculate Conception according to Fr. Kolbe, which depends on the mystical intuition of St. Francis as well as that of Duns Scotus, of all the Franciscan School and the tradition of the Seraphic Order.

Concerning the relation between Incarnation and Redemption, Fr. Kolbe goes beyond Duns Scotus' thinking.

The relationship between Incarnation and Redemption is not very clear in Duns Scotus' line of thinking. Despite the distinctions introduced by him between impassible and passible Incarnation and between the substance and the modality of the same, the problem of the relation is complicated further creating worries by the Thomists to the point of objecting that if Incarnation came about in a passible form, this proves that it could only be decreed after the prevision of sin. At this point, even the Scotist School of thought is damaged, except for some of the great theologians such as Saint Bernardino of Siena, Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, B. Belluto and Saint Maximilian Kolbe.

Father Kolbe overcomes the difficulty originating from the primacy of the dead and resurrected Christ, whose merits influence *differently upon* Mary and the Angels on one hand and men on the other hand. For Father Kolbe there is no distinction between the substance and the modality of Incarnation, since God decided to elevate Mary, the Angels and men to a life of grace through the dead-risen Christ, who is the only type of Man that the other intelligent creatures must conform to achieve eternal salvation. Father Kolbe does not stop to explain all the details of how this is possible, however he highlights the profound meaning of the Immaculate Conception seeing in it Mary's ability to love received from God with out limitations or influences coming from below: the holiness of Mary is *the deifying elevation* of Her person. This is the positive meaning of Her exemption fro original sin, the fullness of grace conceded by God to give Herself without holding back to God and to men and to the Angels Her children. For Father Kolbe, the itinerary does not go from the sin to justification, but from the elevation of the person of Mary to the fullness of divine life, where She progresses continuously until Her bodily

assumption to heavenly glory. For Duns Scotus, the Virgin was subjected to the law of original justice just like all other men in Adam, who then after original sin was abolished by Her as for all the descendants of Adam, so that in Her there was the possibility of contracting original sin but was preserved from it in virtue of the most perfect Mediator; instead for Father Kolbe, the Virgin was predestined to Divine Motherhood in virtue of Christ's merit, *ipso facto* elevated to the state of fullness of grace and holiness and because of this could not be subjected to the contraction of original sin. For Duns Scotus, Christ's sacrifice intervenes to preserve Mary from the consequences coming from the law of the abolition of original justice in Adam, for Father Kolbe, Christ's sacrifice influences Mary's election to being His Mother and thereby Her elevation in Him to the state of fullness of grace, exempting Her from any debt from contracting original sin.

The most perfect mediation of Christ, with respect to Mary His Mother, according to Father Kolbe, is much deeper and more radical than the one Duns Scotus attributes to Christ.

2. *Understanding the Marian privilege*

In the understanding of the Marian privilege, Father Kolbe prefers to see it and express it in positive terms, which underline the heavenly sanctity of Mary.

«The Immaculate Virgin draws Her origin from God, is a creature, is a conception, the Immaculate Conception... She clearly asserted being not only conceived without sin, but the self-same Immaculate Conception, just like the difference between a white object and its whiteness, a perfect object and its perfection... The Immaculate Virgin is the most perfect of creatures, was elevated above all other creatures and is a "divine" creature in an ineffable way».

«Who are you, o Immaculate Conception? Not God since He has no beginning; not an angel created from nothing; not Adam made of earth; not Eve drawn from Adam nor the Word made Flesh, which existed since eternity and was "conceived" rather than concept. Before the conception, the sons of Eve did not exist, therefore it is better to call this "conception"; however, you are different from them because they are conceptions contaminated by original sin, while you are the only Immaculate Conception».

«From the first instant of Her being, She was different from the other human beings, because their conception is soiled by original sin due to this conception of children from parents that have sinned, while her conception was excluded from this common law, an immaculate conception. *She alone has the right to such a name and as a consequence of this, it is truly the name that defines Her in the most essential way*».

Mary was wanted and achieved by God in time (conception) as the most perfect resemblance to the essence of God possible in a pure creature (immaculate).

«In the vast number of possible beings reproducing His various perfections, from all of eternity God also saw a perfect Being from every aspect, uncontaminated by any sin and reflecting His divine attributes in the most faithful way possible for a created being. He was happy with this prospect and decided, from eternity, to call this Being into existence at a determined time». These assertions clearly show that God thought this perfect Being (Mary) since eternity in an absolute way, that is independently from original sin and decided to call it into existence in view of His Son Christ, who with His death obtained perfect existence and sanctity. From this stems the following conclusion by Father Kolbe: «In Herself She is nothing, like the other creatures, but through God's work She is the most perfect among creatures. The most perfect resemblance of the Divine Being in a purely human creature. Therefore, She comes from the Father through the Son and the Spirit, since the Creator from nothing, in His own image, in the image of the Most Holy Trinity,

called the finite beings into existence, for the love of the finite resemblances they reproduce. Beings with wills and reason know and recognize their provenance and know that they have received all they are and have from God at every moment. They return this with love, for what they have received as well as for the fact that He, as infinite perfection, is worthy of an infinite love. As a consequence of this, as limited beings not able to give Him infinite love, they break through the barriers that limit this love and the battle to conquer it. The Immaculate never was marred by sin, which means that Her love was always complete, without any obstacles. She loved God with all Her being and this love joined Her in such a perfect way from the first moment of life that, on the day of the Annunciation, the Angel addressed Her by saying: "Full of grace, the Lord is with thee" (Lk 1:28). Therefore, She is a creature of God, a possession of God, resemblance of God, image of God, daughter of God, in the most perfect way possible for a human being. She is an instrument of God. Fully conscious, She allows Herself to be voluntarily led by God, conforms to His will, desires only what He wishes, works according to His will and in the most perfect way possible without the least defect, the least defection, without any deviation from His will. She is God's instrument in the perfect use of the powers and privileges given to Her, to always and in everything achieve uniquely and exclusively the will of God, through love towards God One and Trine».

3. *Mary's mediation in the order of grace*

3.1 *Mary's mediation in the Franciscan Order*

Another inheritance Father Kolbe receives from his Order is the Doctrine of the mediation of Mary in the order of grace.

St. Francis lived this great and consoling truth intensely. His devotion, better yet, his full and total consecration to Mary was the reason for being of his entire life tending to transformation into Christ. The Saint places the entire Order under the protection of Our Lady, expecting all good and grace. Starting from the ontological devotion of Mary in the Incarnation, the Saint drew all graces in the spiritual and temporal order.

Another declarer of the Marian mediation is St. Anthony of Padua, the Evangelical Doctor, who unceasingly spoke about this function of Mary's in the order of grace in the *Sermones*.

St. Bonaventure also developed this theme with great passion and theological depth.

Duns Scotus explicitly speaks about the mediating function of Mary, making it depend on the most perfect one of Christ.

3.2 *The originality of Father Kolbe*

Fr. Kolbe sees Mary's mediation in a vast and profound way. Speaking about the Incarnation, he asserts that Mary practices the first radical mediation collaborating in the same Incarnation: with Her consent the Word became Flesh, receiving a human body from Her. Speaking about the finality of creation of every man and every other creature, Fr. Kolbe, addressing Our Lady, asserts that "for you God created the world. For you, God also called me into being".

Fr. Kolbe is truly original on this point, since no one in the Franciscan Order ever said that God created man and the universe for Mary. His assertion should be placed in relation with what he asserts about the primacy of Mary subordinated to that of Her Son

Christ. Undoubtedly, this is a mediation relative to the final cause of Creation understood however from the point of view of instrumental causality.

In Father Kolbe's thinking, Christ is the only universal Mediator between humanity and the Father; only through Christ's mediation does Creation's answer to the Father's love become infinite from finite, from human to divine and becomes worthy of Him. Because of this, the Son of God comes on earth not only to save us, but also to become the Mediator of *perfect* adoration of God.

And what does the Mediatrix do towards the Mediator Jesus Christ? Father Kolbe answers: There is no spot in Her, no sin, no deviation from God's will. Only She, as creature renders God a glory without marks... Therefore, our glory to Jesus through the Immaculate - (and to God the Father) through Jesus is also uncontaminated and infinite, worthy of the divine Majesty.

But Father Kolbe's thinking does not stop at the mediation of Mary. Mary is chosen by God as the Mother of His Son and therefore the Mediatrix of grace because She must accompany Him inseparably in the achievement of salvation, that is to say in Redemption. Son and Mother work together in originating a life of grace, (Redemption and Co-redemption) and distributing it among men. For Father Kolbe, the role of Mary cannot be reduced to making our actions pure and holy before Her Son and this comes out from the fact that the Angels that remained faithful to God owe this to the merits of Mary their Mother and Queen. Here we find ourselves facing the influence of Mary upon the salvation of the Angels in absolute order.

Father Kolbe's Christocentrism is undeniable. However, he teaches that nearing Christ can only be achieved through Mary, because only through Her He came among us, becoming Man. In Her, Jesus wanted to deposit the inexhaustible treasure of graces and only through Her, being immune to all sin (original or today's), wants them to reach us.

With regards to this, Father Kolbe expresses his thinking with a beautiful image, asserting that the king (Christ) can be found not outside but inside the kingdom (Mary): «Do not look for the King (Jesus) near the palace, but inside, well inside, within the rooms (Mary)». If one does not enter the palace, one cannot find Jesus.

Developing his thinking on Mary's mediating function for men towards Christ, Father Kolbe makes a highly theologically valuable precision. Jesus, for Saint Maximilian, is the direct Mediator, the immediate one between God and men, but without excluding Mary. «It might seem that we ask for everything of Our Lady, honoring Jesus less. *This is an erroneous understanding since Jesus is the God incarnated in Her...* We know full well that the finality of all devotions is God. In the same way, even worshipping the Immaculate is a direct means towards this end. *New must look for Jesus through Her and not in other places, only in Her. We go with one to the other but not from one to the other*».

Christ is the direct mediator, the immediate one in relations to men, but this does not exclude Mary's mediation. One does not go from Mary to Christ, but with Mary to Christ. Christ achieves His function as immediate Mediator, but is always present in Mary, working with Her to lead men to Him. Christ is always present in Mary, whose mediating function in the order of salvation participates. Christ, while using the mediating activity of Mary, directly and immediately reaches each single man and all men together. God is the finality or goal of this aim. Now, She does not have the duty (nor could She) of developing Her own activity, independent from that of Jesus to give due worship to God. In achieving Her mediating activity, Mary is immediately subject to Jesus the universal mediator of salvation, who operates in Her; and inasmuch as Jesus works in Her Mary develops Her function as mediatrix leading us to Jesus. The mediating function of Mary is not imposed to Jesus', but is completely subordinated to the Son's, since with Her we go towards Jesus, with the same mediating function of Jesus.

What Jesus said: «apart from me you can do nothing» (*Jn 15:5*) is mainly applied to His Mother Mary's cooperation in the order of grace. The more a creature is united to God and participates in His holiness, the more it is subordinated to Him in the order of the mediating activity, receiving deeper participation in His operative sanctifying influence. The unique and exclusive function, as opposed to that of all the other creatures, of the mediation of Mary for the salvation of men does not hide or block Jesus', rather it manifests it in an evident way.

In one word, Father Kolbe asserts that Christ immediately reaches each man with the cooperation of His Mother Mary.

IV. Concretizing of the Franciscan Christological and Mariological motifs in Father Kolbe's apostolate

1. Fr. Kolbe is faithful to the intuitions of the Franciscan school about the mystery of the absolute predestination of Christ and of Mary

Addressing Mary, Fr. Kolbe expresses himself in the following way: «God created the world for you. For you, God also called me into being». God wanted the material world and men in relation to the existence of Mary, the Mother of the Word made Flesh.

Creating the angels, God manifested the Mystery of the Incarnation to them and announced that He would have called into being a human with a soul and a body, and that He would raise this creature to the dignity of Mother of God, making Her their queen. Mary's existence – this perfect Being from every aspect, uncontaminated by any sign of sin, reflecting the divine attributes in the most faithful way possible for a created being – is *indissolubly* tied to that of Jesus, Her Son, the Word made Flesh. Mary is understandable only in relation to the Word made Flesh where She is a Mother in the real and proper meaning of the word.

Fr. Maximilian, in delving into the problem of Mary's absolute primacy in the order of Creation, declares that the Immaculate is the apex of Creation's love returning to God, the being unmarred by sin, completely beautiful, completely belonging to God. Always having belonged to God, the miracle of the union of God and Creation comes about in Her. Reflection on the Immaculate brings Fr. Kolbe to consider the relations that the Divine Persons make with Her in the realization of the Mystery of the Incarnation. In Scotus' thinking, the Immaculate is presented as She who highlights the sublimity of the Mystery of the Incarnation and the most perfect efficacy of the Mediator where the Saint "par excellence" makes his personal entry into history to achieve salvation. Mary is the most beautiful fruit, the masterpiece of the saving mediation of Her Divine Son. The Divine Motherhood demands the Immaculate Conception. Incarnation demands the Immaculate Conception. The Immaculate is the dawn that is the prelude of the hypostatic presence of the Son of God, the eternal Sun of justice, in human nature.

2. Fr. Kolbe, the genial promoter of the Marian apostolate

P. Kolbe divides the history of the Marian activity of our Order into two periods: the first expands from the Seraphic Founder until December 8th 1854 (dogmatic definition); the second extends from 1854 to the end of human history on earth. In the first period, our Fathers defended the Marian privilege; during the second period, the entire Order of Friars Minor Conventual must direct its activity to bringing the Immaculate Mary into the lives of souls. This is a divine mandate, which follows the doctrinal one that is the

defense of the Marian privilege. The creation of the Militia of Mary Immaculate must fulfill this new mandate throughout the world.

Fr. Kolbe makes St. Francis' religious life and apostolate true. Everybody knows the importance for St. Francis' religious life of the terms «conversion», «penance», «poverty», «love», «devotion to Mary», «union with Christ» and «return to the Father». Fr. Kolbe makes the meaning of these words true by highlighting the function of the Immaculate in the life of every soul.

Fr. Kolbe explicitly renders the sense of entrusting the Order to Mary proposed by St. Francis. The Saint explained: "Belonging to the Immaculate as Her knights means to consider ourselves Hers from every viewpoint, for one's entire life, in death and for eternity. To be Hers irrevocably, forever. Being knights of the Immaculate is a fact that commits to becoming evermore intimately Hers and therefore *resembling Her*, so that the knight, so to speak, is transformed completely into Her and that Our Lady may mirror Her spirit in him and that She may think, speak, love God and others for him". Here we are dealing with the field of mysticism, what is proper of the Divine Persons, who share with us their life as main cause and in the humanity of Christ as an instrumental cause, Fr. Kolbe analogically also attributes this to Mary.

Here as in other fields, dogmatic doctrinal truth is the principle of spiritual activity, the practice of the Marian Knight. Understanding the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception must influence so deeply the life of the Marian Knight that he will totally penetrate himself so as to live only for Mary and for Mary through the Incarnated Word in relation to the Trinity.

A particular characteristic of the Kolbian spirituality is *total self-dispossession* in function of divinization that is the transformation into Christ. «The more a soul imitates Jesus, the more it becomes similar to Him, and the more similar it becomes to Him, the more holy it becomes, divinizing itself». Dispossession expresses the negative aspect, divinization the positive aspect of holiness. The concept of dispossession, in Fr. Kolbe's thinking, implies that a knight must completely divest himself to become the absolute possession of the Immaculate Mary. He must become Mary's property. «Always remember that you are an absolute, unconditioned, unlimited, irrevocable thing and possession of the Immaculate; whoever you are, whatever you have or can do, everything you do (thoughts, words, acts) and you bear (pleasing, displeasing or indifferent things) belongs completely to Her. In consequence of this, She can dispose of this at Her (not your) complete pleasure». Dispossession is presented in stages so that one may gradually achieve being a living reproduction of the dead and risen Jesus. However, there is an obstacle to the realization of this. Man, in fact, tends to own and own himself independently from God. Fr. Kolbe's spirituality tends to uproot man from this state of self-possession, to achieve the state of absolute poverty not only in the use and ownership of material and spiritual goods, but above all in the field of the will and full availability to the will of God and of the Immaculate. The knight must become a being fully possessed by God through the Immaculate. Dispossession must lead the knight to a life of abandonment to Providence. This is the last level of poverty according to St. Francis, which for Fr. Kolbe must coincide with the total consecration of the Knight to the Immaculate Mary. All of this includes the *divinization* of our being (soul) in a positive way. Decentralizing, getting out of oneself as one's center, the knight must belong in an evermore perfect way to God; this is what divinization consists of. From owning oneself, under the action of God, he must become a being possessed by the Immaculate. «She is the Mother of God that generated Jesus Christ in the souls of men. *We must become Hers as She is of God*. She is of God to the point of becoming His Mother and we wish to become the mother that gives birth to the Immaculate in all hearts that are and will be. This is the M. I.: make Her enter all hearts: that She may bear sweet Jesus, God and make Him grow to the perfect age by entering

these souls. What a beautiful mission...! The divinization of man, to the point of becoming Man-God (*sic!*) through the Mother of the Man-God. This is how the divinizing life, the life of the Most Holy Trinity, flows from the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to our poor hearts». We find ourselves facing the authentic concept of divinization: the Most Holy Trinity, and on the other hand, the instrumental causes: the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Immaculate, full of God One and Trine, pours divine life into souls and leads them to holiness. The Knight, according to the Kolbian vision, must live in a continuous relation with the Trinity through Jesus and the Immaculate and then he will become a tool in collaboration in spreading the Kingdom, the supernatural presence of Jesus in the souls of all. The presence of Jesus is the presence of love, because Jesus-God is Love. And Jesus becomes present in the souls through the Holy Spirit who, according to Fr. Kolbe, is the love of the Father and of the Son, the love with which God loves Himself, the love of the Most Holy Trinity. Therefore, divinization includes an inter-personal relation between the created and uncreated persons through the Incarnate Word and the Immaculate. Fr. Kolbe intends to underline divinization as the full realization of the human person through his relation with the Divine Persons, through a process of mystical identification with the Immaculate.

All of this gives a deep meaning to the terms «conversion», «penance» and sheds light on the meaning of the religious vows: poverty, obedience, and chastity are the poverty, obedience and chastity of Mary. This way, religious life is the life of Mary in each Franciscan and in the community he is a member of. Analogously, these things also are valid for the Militia of Mary.

The Knight of the Immaculate must realize in himself this ideal (the process of mystic identification) in such a way as to become an instrument in the hands of the Immaculate to divulgate the presence of God. Trinity of souls. And since this spreading of the Holy Spirit in the souls with the collaboration of the Immaculate Mary, the Knight, according to Fr. Kolbe, must live the presence of the Holy Spirit through Mary in the most intimate part of himself and thus be able to carry out his own activities whose finality is the sanctification of souls. To bring the Holy Spirit through Mary to and in souls is the finality of the Militia. The apostolate of Fr. Kolbe is the Franciscan apostolate, theorized and perfectly lived until the return of the Lord Jesus at the end of human history.

St. Francis is the Madonna's knight, Saint Bonaventure is Her poet, Scotus the theologian to the point of earning the title of Marian Doctor, Father Kolbe is the mystic, the theologian and the apostle of the new times.

Fr. Luigi Iammarrone, OFMConv

