

The Cosmic Mystery of Mary and the Action of the Holy Spirit: A Study of Marian Apparitions and Manifestations and Their Significance for the Pilgrim People of God

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The Cosmic Mystery of Mary and the Action of the Holy Spirit:
A Study of Marian Apparitions and Manifestations and
Their Significance for the Pilgrim People of God

A DISSERTATION
Submitted to the Ecclesiastical Faculty of the
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Doctor of Sacred Theology

By
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Flynn M. Fernandes

ABSTRACT

The cosmic mystery of Mary draws attention to what the Roman Catholic Church celebrates as her heavenly reign, an aspect of which is the proliferation of Marian apparitions and manifestations around the world particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries. This dissertation underscores that these historical interventions are manifestations of the action of the Holy Spirit in the particular figure of Mary and is attentive to the different ways God's graces flow to the whole people of God without conflating the person of Mary with the Person of the Spirit. The instrumental nature of Mary's relation to the Spirit in carrying out Christ's salvific work is the centerpiece of this study. A key aspect of this work is the mutual recognition of non-Christians in that Mary's appearances to a number of seers is not contingent on their being or becoming Christian. A number of modern apparitions have assumed political significance because of the social turmoil of the periods when they occurred. Of interest here, is an understanding of the Spirit's implementation in Mary's intellect and will, and the reception of her apparition messages in ways that are transformative for ecclesial life and all God's people.

This work includes an exposition of some of the scriptural, ecumenical, interreligious, and ecclesiastical foundations for understanding the Spirit's action in Mary, and their influence on contemporary mariological discourse since the Second Vatican Council. It reviews some of the key insights from the two-thousand year history of Marian apparitions, the complexity of the phenomenon, and the trends observed during the modern period. Vailankanni (India), Zeitoun (Egypt), and Kibeho (Rwanda) are three case studies included based on the persistence of a Marian cult, pilgrim growth, and contemporary sociopolitical and religious concerns. The rise in Hindu nationalism in India, political tensions and growth of pan-Islamism in North Africa and the Middle East, and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda are studied using the historical-critical method and comparative studies of religion within the scope of apparitions, drawing attention to the marginalization of particular demographics based on religious or ethnic origin.

Understanding the Spirit's implementation in Mary enhances the analysis of the implications of these phenomena. The Spirit's work through Mary's cosmic mystery has profound, far-reaching significance for the world church and all God's people. The three cases reveal how Marian apparitions evolve from obscure events in insignificant places to global centers of Christian spirituality. They make known the hidden potential of the gospel to apply Christian revelation to localized, particular challenges in new situations with permanent, prophetic, and eschatological implications. The permanent examines how the repetitive or apocalyptic nature of Mary's appeals mobilizes the *sensus fidelium* through the transforming power of pilgrimage, its impact on Marian devotion, and the emergence of new ecclesial movements. The prophetic addresses Christian and interreligious unity through dialogical encounter, equality for all, God's justice, and the preferential option for the poor. The global reach of Marian apparitions expresses the oneness of Mary operating under the power of the Spirit, accompanying a global humanity-in-pilgrimage towards the eschatological reign of God.

In loving memory of

Donaclara Fernandes

(1941 – 2017)

My mother and first teacher of the Catholic faith,
who made *Jesus Christ* known to all she encountered through her love of
the Holy Eucharist and her devotion to the *Blessed Virgin Mary*

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Closer home, there are no words to express my gratitude to my parents, Sebastian and Donaclara, my first teachers of the Catholic faith who instilled in me Christian values and ethics. At the start of this dissertation journey, I experienced the heartbreak of losing my mother. Her abiding love of Christ and her devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary have inspired me to dedicate this work to her loving memory. Lastly, I can never repay two remarkable people in my life—my wife Gladys and my son Aaron—for their love, tireless patience, and enduring support without which this work might have remained unfinished.

PREFACE

This study draws attention to what is transpiring at the sites of the Virgin Mary's apparitions and manifestations particularly those in modern and postmodern times. Previously, these phenomena were thought to be the sole jurisdiction of the Catholic Church and that Mary appeared only in Catholic contexts, but as Frank Jacobs comments on a 2015 article of the *National Geographic*,¹ "she met mere mortals with and without the Vatican's approval."² As an Indian Catholic, I think of the example of Vailankanni where centuries ago, Mary allegedly appeared in a non-Christian context to two Hindu boys on separate occasions; a Catholic dimension was later added with a third manifestation, this time to Portuguese sailors. Since these events in the 16th and 17th centuries, Vailankanni has transcended religious boundaries drawing more Hindus than Christians in pilgrimage to visit the Mother of Health.

Making the case that Marian apparitions are manifestations of the action of the Holy Spirit, this work takes on vital contemporary significance because of the persecution of Christians in many parts of the world owing to their religious identity, a visible aspect of which is their devotion to Mary. The growth of Christianity in the Global South has simultaneously increased the encounter of Christians with followers of other religions as well as led to situations in which their lives and property are threatened. I find alarming that in India some political parties elected to safeguard the fundamental rights of all Indian citizens propagate a nationalist brand of Hinduism that is alien to the common Hindu, and marginalizes Christians and Muslims because of the foreign origins of their faith. Increasing reports of killings of these minorities, desecration of churches and mosques, and new restrictions on the public profession

¹ *National Geographic*, "500 Years of Virgin Mary Sightings on One Map," November 13, 2015, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/11/151113-virgin-mary-sightings-map/> (accessed July 10, 2019).

² Frank Jacobs, "A world map of Virgin Mary apparitions," January 10, 2019, <https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/world-map-marian-apparitions> (accessed July 10, 2019).

of these faiths has replaced the interreligious tolerance and communal ethos that once characterized Indian society, as well as violates one of the country's constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. Despite these threats, the devout continue to risk their lives. My concern, however, is not limited to the Indian Catholic context. I write for the world church and the pilgrim people of God that includes adherents of all religions. Another case I include draws attention to the interreligious witness in the reported manifestations of Mary at Zeitoun in Egypt where Copts live in fear of persecution by Islamic fundamentalists. In a third example that follows the pattern of typical seers, some of the visionaries of the Kibeho apparitions experienced physical and emotional abuse at the hands of their dissenters, as well as became victims of genocide because of their ethnic identity.

The verbalized and unspoken messages of these and other Marian apparitions and manifestations have rekindled the *sensus fidelium*, seeking healing where there is brokenness and peaceful coexistence where there is discord. In every age, whenever there has been a national, interfaith, or intrafaith crisis, there has been a manifestation of the Holy Spirit appealing for repentance, reconciliation, and a return to God. In making similar appeals, Marian apparitions are manifestations of the Spirit operating in Mary to give witness to the various ways God's graces flow not just to Catholics but in acknowledgment of their faith, to all believers. Therefore, the Spirit's own work in the cosmic mystery of Mary has profound and far-reaching spiritual, prophetic and eschatological implications for the whole people of God.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AD	<i>Ad diem illum laetissimum</i>
AG	<i>Ad gentes</i>
ARC	Alliance of Religions and Conservation
ARCIC	Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CCR	Catholic Charismatic Renewal
CDF	Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
CECR	Conférence Évêques Catholiques du Rwanda
DeV	<i>Dominum et vivificantem</i>
DV	<i>Dei verbum</i>
DH	<i>Dignitatis humanae</i>
DI	<i>Dominus Iesus</i>
ES	<i>Ecclesiam suam</i>
EV	<i>Evangelii nuntiandi</i>
FABC	Federation of Asian Bishops Conference
GS	<i>Gaudium et spes</i>
IMRI	International Marian Research Institute
ITC	International Theological Commission
LG	<i>Lumen gentium</i>
MC	<i>Marialis cultus</i>
MD	<i>Munificentissimus Deus</i>
NA	<i>Nostra aetate</i>
RM	<i>Redemptoris mater</i>
Rm	<i>Redemptoris missio</i>
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum concilium</i>
TMV	<i>Tertio millennio adveniente</i>
UNAR	Rwandese National Union
UR	<i>Unitatis redintegratio</i>
UUS	<i>Ut unum sint</i>

... anyone may, without injury to the catholic faith, give no heed to these revelations, and differ from them, provided he does so modestly, not without reason, and without contempt.

—Benedict XIV, *Doctrina de Servorum Dei
Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* (1765)

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit, Mary and Vatican II

Though the Second Vatican Council did not produce a dogmatic document on the Holy Spirit, its proceedings reaffirmed that the Spirit guides and teaches the Church, fulfilling the prophetic intuition of John XXIII who prayed that the epochal event might be a “new Pentecost” in the Church.¹ Ralph Martin writes that every papacy since John XXIII’s prayerful appeal has emphasized the need of the Church and of her members to experience the work of the Spirit in contemporary context as an extension of the first Pentecost when the Paraclete descended upon the apostles, Mary, and others present in the cenacle in Jerusalem (Acts 2: 1-4 NRSV²). Mary’s presence among the apostles is significant for her role in the Church and the universal plan of salvation, a subject taken up at the Council.

After considering the different perspectives on the place of Mary in Christian doctrine and ecclesial life, the voting delegates of Vatican II decided to dedicate Chapter VIII of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, to Mary rather than promulgate a separate document on the Blessed Virgin. The chapter appropriately titled “The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church” is the product of the debates during the first two sessions on this central Marian question.³ In *A Theology of Mary*, Cyril Vollert writes that the debates exposed the maximalist and minimalist tendencies of the bishops and theologians. Among the maximalists who sought to elevate Mary, Vollert points out, some alarmingly overemphasized her privileges and functions as though they were independent and

¹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Christian Joy *Gaudete in domino* (9 May 1975), Chapter 7, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19750509_gaudete-in-domino.html, in Ralph Martin, “A New Pentecost? Catholic Theology and ‘Baptism in the Spirit,’” *Logos* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 19.

² All biblical references and quotes follow the *New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

³ See René Laurentin, *The Question of Mary*, trans. I.G. Pidoux (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

unconnected with the rest of theology. The minimalists reasoned that mariology must be located in the whole of theology around the theme “Mary and the Church,” leaving to Mary her place as a member of the Church, as one of the created and the redeemed.⁴

Emerging Trends after Vatican II

In the decades following the council, there were two notable trends—a revival of pre-conciliar ecclesial movements and the emergence new charismatic groups within the Catholic Church on one hand, and a decline in interest in mariology on the other. The increase in the number of pentecostal Catholic communities of worship that attributed their charisms to the Holy Spirit appeared to be a natural outcome of the ecumenical impulse of the council. As a step in the right direction, it became one of different ways of bridging the divide with mainline Protestants (hereafter, Protestants).⁵ The parallel decline in mariology that the postconciliar period witnessed was not with respect to devotion to Mary among the laity, but in theological circles. While the presses on Marian literature did not come to a halt, Charles Neumann accounts for the different reasons why the number of literary works on Mary drastically dwindled since 1966. Among his attributions are a decline in Marian movements, the attitudes of mariologists, changes in the mariological method, the rationalizing tendency and anti-doctrinal bias among theologians, changes in the overall focus of theological writings, and the trend of demythologization regarding Christian kerygma.⁶ Among the subjects that began to receive significant interest in the postconciliar period are the Holy Spirit, Christian anthropology, and ecumenism.

⁴ Cyril Vollert, *A Theology of Mary* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 13.

⁵ Mainline Protestant churches (a term coined by William Hutchinson) include United Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, United Church of Christ, and Christian Church. See *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900–1960*, William R. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁶ Charles W. Neumann, “The Decline of Interest in Mariology as a Theological Problem,” *Marian Studies* 23, no. 6 (1972): 12-38.

This respective decline and incline in interests in mariology and pneumatology are incompatible because Mary's role in the Incarnation and Redemption is the work of the Holy Spirit. From her predestination to her Assumption, Mary's life is dotted with the presence of the Spirit. One of the eminent theologians of the council, Léon-Josef Suenens affirmed that Vatican II located Mary with the Holy Spirit. The final chapter of *Lumen gentium* argues that if Christ is a mystery and the Church is a mystery, then Mary is also a mystery that can be discovered only in the light of the Holy Spirit.⁷ The charters or constitutions of some of the new ecclesial movements foster devotion to Mary drawing inspiration from her spiritual maternity and her role as *Mater Ecclesiae*, and attribute their existence to the work of the Spirit. For instance, the style of worship of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal that emerged in 1967 is mimetic of the first Pentecost where Mary's presence takes on ecclesiological significance. This further suggests that these contravening trends may be attributed to a less than complete understanding of the action of the Holy Spirit in Mary, first at the Annunciation, then in the Incarnation (at the center of the Nicene Creed), and finally at Pentecost. Therefore, behind the mystery of Mary lies the Holy Spirit.

Biblical Referent for This Study

The same Holy Spirit that lies at the heart of the Marian mystery is constantly at work in the Church—collectively as the Body of Christ as well as in her individual members. After Pentecost, one of the earliest manifestations of the Holy Spirit at work in the church is in the prophet John's letter (Revelation 2 and 3) to the seven churches of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) at the end of the first century. Though John's letter is not historical, its scriptural

⁷ Léon-Josef Suenens, "The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit," in *Mary and Ecumenism: Papers of the 1981 International Congress of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, ed. James Walsh, *The Way Supplement* 45 (June 1982): 8.

import aids an understanding of the Spirit's activity in the life of the Church. Interpretations of John's letter suggest that some of these churches (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) had become complacent in their faith, indifferent to Christian doctrine, prone to heretical influences, and spiritually lukewarm. The letter reveals that the Spirit speaks to these communities of faith through prophetic signs, symbols, and apocalyptic language. The Spirit commends some of these churches for their faithfulness and persistence in fulfilling their mission and in their adherence to the truth, and chastises others for their lack of obedience, vigilance, watchfulness, and spiritual indifference.⁸ What was the Spirit saying to these churches, and how were those messages communicated, serve as a point of reference for other manifestations of the Spirit in the history of the Church. Christian churches today appear united eschatologically, but remain divided on a number of fronts especially those concerning doctrine, dogma, and devotion. Though this biblical referent will not be taken up in subsequent chapters, the reader is urged to think of how some contemporary churches can seem watchful and vigilant and others lukewarm and indifferent. How, then, is the Spirit at work today, and who is the Spirit's agent in trying to bring about healing, dialogue, and unity among the people of God?

An expression of the Spirit's own work in the particular figure of Mary, the Mother of God, is initially manifest progressively at different moments of her earthly life. At the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-28), Mary cooperated with the Spirit in bringing about the Incarnation. At Pentecost (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4) she cooperated with the Spirit in its evangelizing mission. Mary's harmony with the Spirit continued throughout her earthly mission and as

⁸ See Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001).

heavenly intercessor for humanity after her Assumption. For this cooperation with the Holy Spirit, Mary is referred to as the 'Temple of the Holy Spirit' (LG §53).

The instrumental nature of Mary's relation to the Spirit in carrying out Christ's work of salvation is the centerpiece of this study. How has the Spirit accomplished this since Mary's Assumption? Throughout Christian history, there have been claims about the manifest ways in which the Blessed Virgin continues her cooperation as an instrument for accomplishing her Son's work of redemption through the action of the Holy Spirit as revealed by her apparitions and manifestations around the world. In particular, the apocalyptic nature of some of Mary's apparitions has lent itself to the theological imagination and interpretation of many writers. Historical records of the content of Mary's messages during some of her modern apparitions appear to echo those of the Spirit's concerns with the state of the early Christian churches. The proliferation of Marian apparitions and manifestations around the world especially in the 19th and 20th centuries has propelled a world Church in-pilgrimage toward the reign of God.

This study is not a chronicling of the myriad of these apparitions and manifestations in the cosmic mystery of Mary, whether she appeared in a specific location or not, or what she did or did not actually say during her appearances. It is concerned with understanding the manifestations of the Spirit's action in her person, and the reception of her messages attributed to the Spirit in ways that are transformative for the life of the church. Understanding the cooperation and harmony of Mary's will with that of the Spirit enhances the analysis of the implications of these phenomena.

The Central Question

This study attempts to answer the following question:

What is the Holy Spirit saying to the local and world church through the person of Mary in the global panorama of Marian apparitions and manifestations in modern and postmodern times, and the significance of these events and their messages for the pilgrim people of God?

Three Case Studies

The three Marian apparitions selected for inclusion in this work are those at Vailankanni (India), Zeitoun (Egypt) and Kibeho (Rwanda). The selection criteria include the persistence of a cult long after the apparitions concluded, growth in the number of pilgrims and pilgrimages, and the impact to the local church. Vailankanni, Zeitoun, and Kibeho are rich in complexity, diverse in context, and make unique contributions in responding to the central question. A key criterion for choosing these cases is the mutual recognition of non-Christians in that Mary's appearances to a number of the seers in these instances is not contingent on their being or becoming Christian. These three cases have not been selected based on canonical approval by The Holy See, but have at least episcopal recognition by the particular church. Well-known apparitions like Guadalupe, La Salette, Lourdes, and Fátima have received global attention from scholars, theologians, and those engaged in pastoral ministry resulting in volumes of theological literature and devotional material and are, therefore, not in the scope of this work even though they would also make ideal cases. Instead, an analysis of these well-established cases help study the common characteristics of apparitions, the common themes of their messages, and for comparison with the selected cases.

The Question of Method

The historical-critical method and comparative studies of religion are employed in studying the three Marian apparitions in religiously plural contexts—Vailankanni (Chapter 3), Zeitoun (Chapter 4), and Kibeho (Chapter 5). A historical-critical approach that necessitates the use of comparative studies of religion for the selected apparitions in the varied contexts of their local churches offers a comprehensive, multi-dimensional analytical tool for a fuller contextualization of these events, and for an assessment of their implications for those churches. This entails understanding the landscape of the event in terms of its geographic location,

demographics, religious orientation, the impact of the social, cultural, and political influences on the religious praxis of believers, their perception of these events, and the cult that emerges and endures long after these apparitions have ceased.

A Word about Literary Sources

Each chapter identifies the literary sources engaged in each of its subsections. The religio-political and sociocultural contexts of each apparition has demanded research into what authors and interlocutors from those contexts are saying. Where possible, reported testimonies from seers and eyewitnesses are included. Though eyewitness accounts are treated with some degree of circumspection, their statements give texture to the depth of the larger story. With this in mind, a diverse set of perspectives are engaged in conversation, including those of academic scholars, apparitionists, theologians, ethicists, feminists, clergy and religious. It is worth noting that contemporary scholars are not writing about apparitions. For this reason, some resources used to study the three selected apparitions are dated, but valid. Some writers express themselves from devotional and biased perspectives and add insights open to discussion and debate. Nonetheless, their works offer important historical detail not found elsewhere.

Structure of This Work

This study consists of six chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 begins with the contemporary discourse on the Holy Spirit and Mary followed by an exposition of the scriptural, ecumenical, interreligious, and ecclesiastical foundations of their unified action. Chapter 2 highlights some of the insights from the history of Marian apparitions and manifestations and describes the complexity of the phenomenon, outlining the method of investigation and process of authentication and approval by the Church. The second section analyzes the common characteristics and common themes of messages of apparitions in the modern period.

Chapter 3 is a historical-critical study of the apparitions of the Mother of Health to two Hindu boys at Vailankanni in the 16th century and a manifestation to Portuguese sailors in the 17th century. This case has contemporary ecclesial significance for the Indian Catholic Church because of the rise in Hindu nationalism and a spate of violence and persecution of Christians and Muslims in different parts of India.

Chapter 4 is a historical-critical study of the serial manifestations of the Mother of Light at Zeitoun in Cairo, Egypt from 1968 to 1971. Initial witnesses were Muslim garage workers, but later seers included the Orthodox and Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, followers of other faiths, and atheists. This modern apparition has contemporary significance for the Church in North Africa and the Middle East because political tensions and the rise of pan-Islamism in the region have tarnished the spirit of interreligious unity observed during these manifestations.

Chapter 5 is a historical-critical study of the serial apparitions of the Mother of the Word in Kibeho, Rwanda from 1981 to 1989. Mary reportedly appeared to seven girls and a boy (6 Catholic, one Muslim, and one an adherent of African traditional religion). Her prophetic warnings proved apocalyptic for Rwanda. Repentance by the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide and local and national efforts at reconciliation put Rwandans on the path toward healing, spiritual hope and renewal.

Chapter 6 expands on the ecclesial implications of these case studies for the contemporary Church within the scope of the Spirit's action in Mary. This chapter addresses the permanent and prophetic functions of these apparitions.⁹ The *permanent function* of apparitions addresses their impact on faith in terms of religious practice and spiritual renewal. The *prophetic function* draws attention to dialogue (ecumenical and interreligious) as a key aspect of

⁹ See for example, René Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, trans. Luke Griffin (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1990), 116, 118.

evangelization and a mode of being church in the twenty-first century. Both these functions address issues important for Christian anthropology such as human flourishing and liberation.

The Conclusion draws on a vital ecclesial image of Vatican II, the Pilgrim Church in which pilgrim Mary plays the role of member, companion, and Mother. Through her cosmic mystery, Mary guides this Pilgrim Church toward the reign of God as an instrument of the Holy Spirit. In this respect, her appearances have an eschatological character wherein the Spirit leads the Church and the whole people of God toward their eschatological reality.

An Invitation

Skeptics, critics, and minimalists wary of the Marian movement abound. The degree of skepticism regarding Marian piety and devotion varies from individual-to-individual both within the Catholic Church and outside. Some confuse ‘devotion to’ and ‘honoring of’ Mary with ‘worship’ and ‘veneration’ that are reserved for Christ alone. The Church’s sanction of cultic movements around apparitions has in a big way contributed to this confusion. Others are accepting of certain aspects of Marian devotion, but are dismissive of the phenomenon of apparitions and manifestations that they believe to be a product of human imagination. Protestants have their own reservations concerning Marian fervor and piety, and the place accorded to Mary in Catholic doctrine and theology.

The Catholic Church has her share of Marian minimalists among her theologians. This study invites these theologians to pay attention to what is going on in these apparitions and in their aftermath, especially with respect to mobilizing the *sensus fidelium*. The Roman Catholic Church does not impose belief in apparitions, but does not take their authentication process lightly either. Approvals require adherence to stringent philosophical, scientific, and theological criteria, and even then, they are rare. This study considers the impact of these events on the faith

of the church, and on the pilgrim people of God. Therefore, when the Church approves these events, theologians are urged to pay attention. This invitation also challenges Marian minimalists, skeptics, and critics to understand the question of Mary in terms of her role in the Church and in the economy of salvation as an instrument of the Spirit's action without conflating her person with that of the Spirit.

Before turning to Chapter 1, clarification is necessary with respect to the last point. In this work, terms like "convergence," "harmony," "synergy," "union," and "unity," are used to describe the Spirit's action in Mary. This study is careful not to conflate the person of Mary with the Person of the Holy Spirit, or to subsume the Spirit under her human person. Drawing attention to Mary does not elevate her as a fourth Person of the Godhead or equate her with the Third Person of the Trinity. Rather than removing the spotlight on the divinity of the Holy Spirit, attention given to Mary's agency serves to enhance an understanding of the eternal presence and work of the Spirit in the Church, a point that becomes clearer in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER I

Foundations for Understanding the Action of the Holy Spirit in Mary

1.0 Mary, Instrument of the Holy Spirit

In his 1974 Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, Paul VI called for an exploration of the bond between the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, not only by theologians, but also by those engaged in pastoral ministry.¹ Allusions and direct references to this spiritual bond have however, been part of an unspoken tradition from the time of the ancient Christian church. Basing their writings and treatises on Scripture, biblical scholars, historians, theologians, preachers, and teachers have drawn insights on Mary as “fashioned by the Holy Spirit and shaped into a new creature” (MC §26; LG §56). Their works help unravel the hidden relationship between the Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and its influence on the Church.

In preparation for the third millennium, in 1994 John Paul II issued an apostolic letter, *Tertio millennio adveniente* that devoted a special section to the Holy Spirit and Mary (TMA §44-48). He declared 1998 as the *Year of the Holy Spirit*. Earlier in 1986, he issued *Dominum et vivificantem*, an encyclical on the Holy Spirit that is replete with allusions to Mary and the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (*DeV* §49-54, §59-66).² In this encyclical the pope states, “The Church wishes to prepare for this Jubilee in the Holy Spirit, just as the Virgin of Nazareth in whom the Word was made flesh was prepared by the Holy Spirit.”³ The “new Pentecost” ushered in at Vatican II inspired the church’s efforts to recover a theology of the Holy Spirit in Catholic theology. Studying Mary in pneumatological perspective enhances this recovery through an

¹ Eamon R. Carroll, *Understanding the Mother of Jesus* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), 62.

² James H. Kroeger, “The Holy Spirit and Mary Unfold God’s Loving Design for Humanity,” *African Ecclesiastical Review* 40, no. 3 (1998): 130-132.

³ John Paul II, Encyclical on the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World *Dominum et vivificantem* (18 May 1986), §66, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem.html.

understanding of how the action of the Holy Spirit in her life, and the unity of their action unfolds God's loving plan for humanity. This chapter lays the foundations for the action of the Spirit in Mary in two sections. The first section addresses the contemporary discourse on the Holy Spirit and Mary after Vatican II. The second section is an exposition of the scriptural, ecumenical, interreligious, and ecclesiastical foundations that over time have influenced the contemporary dialogue.

1.1 Contemporary Discourse on the Holy Spirit and Mary in Ecclesial Life

Since Vatican II, the place of Mary in gospel tradition and in ecclesial life is being reappraised by both Catholic and Protestant theologians.⁴ Some of the most important developments in thinking about Mary are the collaborative and ecumenical biblical studies of Protestant and Catholic scholars and the revised image of Mary in feminist and liberation theologies. The acknowledgment of implicit activity of the Holy Spirit in these areas necessitates greater emphasis as does the Spirit's role in the growth in Marian apparitions in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the movements that have emerged and developed as a result.

1.1.1 The Catholic-Evangelical Debate Concerning the Holy Spirit and Mary

Contrary to the prevalent perception from a bygone age, there has been a resurgence of interest in Mary in the churches of the Protestant tradition in the last few decades. Beverly Gaventa, whose New Testament scholarship includes two significant titles on Mary, credits the efforts of the Anglican scholar, John Macquarrie, for his contribution to the ecumenical conversation by endeavoring to recast Marian teaching in language that is palatable to Protestants. However, Gaventa suspects that even Macquarrie's attempts have had limited success in satisfying Protestants, and therefore, the only way Protestants are going to engage in

⁴ Daniel L. Migliore, "Woman of Faith: Toward a Reformed Understanding of Mary," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, eds. Beverly R. Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 118.

any ecumenical conversation about Mary is to begin with Scripture.⁵ She looks to Matthew, Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, and John to explore what Protestants may have lost in their reluctance to speak about Mary.⁶ In Matthew, Mary is a silent figure who shares in the threats to Jesus' life from the time of his birth. In Luke, she becomes the prophetic interpreter of the angel's words at the Annunciation, a person capable of interpreting the events around her, and one who responds to them in her own way. In Acts, her presence with the apostles in the upper room praying during the vigil of the Pentecost reaffirms her discipleship. In John, Mary remains unnamed and is completely defined by her status as 'the mother of Jesus' and exists in the narrative to reveal something about Jesus, not about herself.⁷ In harmonizing these gospel accounts, Gaventa finds each of them consistent with the identification of Mary as Jesus' first disciple. She contends that if there is agreement that Mary is a disciple, then Protestants should not hesitate that she is mother of believers. The Protestant concern that giving attention to Mary distracts from that rightly due to her Son, though valid, may be overdrawn because if Mary through her discipleship evangelizes others, they are not her disciples, but those of Jesus.⁸

Protestants also argue that Catholic devotion replaces the Holy Spirit with Mary. Suenens quotes an article by Elsie Gibson as an indication of the Protestant complaint. In her article, Gibson writes:

It is possibly as difficult for Catholics to understand what Protestants believe about the Holy Spirit as it is for Protestants to understand what Catholics believe about Mary. ... The catholic consensus is that we [Protestants] glorify human impulses and judgments, attributing them to the inspiration of the third person of the Trinity. This is a travesty of the protestant position. When I began to study catholic theology, in every place I expected

⁵ Beverly R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 123-124.

⁶ Gaventa, *Mary*, 29-125. Gaventa includes the narrative of Mary's early life from the *Protoevangelium of James*. She explores the canonical narratives in "All Generations Will Call Me Blessed," in *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, eds. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria M. Robbins (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 124-128.

⁷ Gaventa, "All Generations," 126-128.

⁸ Gaventa, "All Generations," 129.

to find an exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, I found Mary. What Protestants universally attribute to the action of the Holy Spirit, was attributed to Mary.⁹

Gibson's claim is not without basis. In fact, as Marian piety and devotion increased, Mary has taken center stage in the lives of the Catholic faithful shifting the spotlight away from both Christ and the Holy Spirit. There are instances where the articulation of Mary's role by Catholic saints and popes has been exaggerated and even theologically unacceptable. Yves Congar provides an example of one such text by Bernardine of Siena (d. 1444) that Leo XIII later quoted in his encyclical *Iucunda semper expectatione* (1894):

All grace that is communicated to this world comes to us by a threefold movement. It is dispensed according to a very perfect order from God in Christ, from Christ in the Virgin and from the Virgin in us.¹⁰

Congar writes that Bernardine adds to this text that Mary has at her disposal,

a certain jurisdiction or authority over the temporal procession of the Holy Spirit, to such an extent that no creature has ever received the grace of any virtue from God except through a dispensation of the Virgin herself.¹¹

It is odd that a pope would not use discretion when citing such a text in his encyclical; not just Protestants, even Catholics should find such a text unacceptable. To address the Protestant concern, Suenens claims that if Catholic theology insists on the dynamic unity between the Holy Spirit and Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation, it can be a turning point in bridging the gap between Protestants and Catholics (including the Orthodox and Anglican traditions). Stressing Mary's role in pneumatological perspective while at the same time reserving to the Third Person of the Trinity the primary role of God's Spirit is one way of doing this. The use of expressions like *ad Jesum per Mariam* in a secondary, derived sense, and always in

⁹ Elsie Gibson, "Mary and the Protestant Mind," *Review for Religious* 24 (1965), 396, in *A New Pentecost?* Léon-Josef Suenens, trans. Francis Martin (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 197-198; Suenens, "Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit," 6.

¹⁰ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Iucunda semper expectatione* (1894): AAS, 27 (1894-95), 179, in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit Volume I: The Holy Spirit in the 'Economy,'* Yves Congar, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 163-164; Yves Congar: *Theologian of the Church* (Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs Book 32), ed. Gabriel Flynn (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2005), 309.

¹¹ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit Volume I*, 310.

dependence on the Holy Spirit then becomes much less reproachable not only by Protestants but by some Orthodox Catholic writers as well.¹²

In her article, Gibson presents two points of view for a way out of this impasse. First, Protestants recognize holiness engendered in individuals, forms of action, or developments in ecclesial life as the presence or action of the Holy Spirit. If Catholics find these effects of the Holy Spirit more visible in Mary than in anyone else, and therefore, glorify what the Spirit has accomplished in her, it makes their position more tenable. Second, if Mary's life is an example of the first fruit of an abiding action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, it might help Protestants understand the priority given to her in the Catholic Church. The consideration of what the Spirit has accomplished in Mary's life is a way of possibly removing many misconceptions about Catholic devotion to Mary as Mother of God and Mother of the Church.¹³

Suenens affirms that at the Annunciation, Mary is an expression of the pure love of a creature uplifted to encounter the Holy Spirit. Throughout her life, Mary remained open to the Spirit's hidden power and action. Her motherhood extends beyond her giving the Son of God his human nature to her spiritual motherhood. The Council of Ephesus (431) dogmatically affirmed her 'Mother of God' because in the Incarnate Word the Christ of faith and Jesus of history are one. Suenens writes that her "yes" at the Annunciation grew through the darkness of her Son's death on the cross into the light of his resurrection. The graces that the Church receives today remain implied in Mary's fiat under the impulse of the Holy Spirit¹⁴ for it is the Spirit, Suenens writes, who christianized her at a depth beyond all understanding.¹⁵ Yet, as the Catholic Church teaches, Mary's role is not in the order of bestowing grace; her place is not as Mediator, because

¹² Suenens, *New Pentecost?*, 198-199; Suenens, "Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit," 6.

¹³ Suenens, *New Pentecost?*, 199.

¹⁴ Suenens, *New Pentecost?*, 202-203.

¹⁵ Suenens, *New Pentecost?*, 204-206.

those belong to Christ and his Spirit. Mary's role is in relation to human response. Following her example helps the faithful listen to the Spirit's promptings. Vatican II called her "a sign of sure hope and solace" for the pilgrim people of God.¹⁶

Setting aside what has been called Catholic mariolatry, Paul VI best summarizes the Catholic Church's position with respect to Marian devotion. In his opening of *Marialis cultus*, he says devotion to Mary is Christian worship as "it takes its origin and effectiveness from Christ, finds its complete expression in Christ, and leads through Christ in the Spirit to the Father."¹⁷ The eighteenth-century mariologist, William Chaminade, puts it simply: "We do not go to Mary as our God, but we go to God through Mary, as faith tells us He came to us through her."¹⁸ How, then can we ignore the one person without whose "yes" there would be no Incarnation? How can we ignore Mary who played a central role in Jesus' life? Carrie Gress, author of *The Marian Option*, writes that to ignore her is to deform the story and not tell it correctly, and is more of a dishonor to Jesus than to Mary. She affirms that when Catholics come to Mary, she brings them to Christ; whenever and wherever she is honored Christ is honored as well. She recalls Paul VI's analogy "the sun will never be dimmed by the light of the moon" in his homily for the beatification of Maximilian Kolbe who himself was renowned for his abiding devotion to Mary.¹⁹

The next subsection is a discourse on Mary in light of the Holy Spirit from a feminist perspective.

¹⁶ Vatican II, LG §68, in Suenens, *New Pentecost?*, 206.

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, Introduction, in *The Marian Option: God's Solution to a Civilization in Crisis*, Carrie Gress (Charlotte: TAN Books, 2017), 106.

¹⁸ John M. Samaha, "William Joseph Chaminade's Contribution to Mariology," *International Marian Research Institute*, <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/w/william-joseph-chaminades-contribution-to-mariology.php>, in Gress, *Marian Option*, 105.

¹⁹ Paul VI, "St. Maximilian Kolbe's Beatification Homily," The Holy See, October 17, 1971 (translated from Italian: *come non mai sar  oscurato il sole dalla luna*), in Gress, *Marian Option*, 106.

1.1.2 The Holy Spirit and Mary in Feminist Perspective

In *I Believe in the Holy Spirit Volume III*, Congar reflects on the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:27 to assert the claim that something masculine and something feminine must reside within God in transcendent form. A pre-Trinitarian monotheism and a neglect of the Holy Spirit have led to a patriarchal emphasis on masculinity. Therefore, Congar insists that the contemporary Church must revisit older concepts and common traditions to address more fully its masculinity and femininity without relegating women to submissive roles from which they wish to emerge as authentic persons.²⁰ In using the example of Mary, feminist discourse does not seek to elevate her; rather it dismisses androcentricism as the dominant principle in any interpretation of Trinitarian theology, the *imago Dei*, or in any dualistic anthropology.

1.1.2.1 Catherine LaCugna's Trinitarian Theology: God's Invitation into the *Imago Dei*

Catherine LaCugna's Trinitarian theology serves two important purposes for a feminist perspective on Mary in light of the Holy Spirit. First, it clarifies the distinction of a Trinitarian Person from a human person, key to a Catholic understanding of Mary's role in the economy of salvation. Second, it presents the feminist position founded on the *imago Dei* that seeks equality and justice against any form of marginalization of peoples and upholds an egalitarian and authentic understanding of "human person" made in the likeness of God. LaCugna reads Trinitarian doctrine as "a teaching about *God's life with us and our life with each other*"²¹ creating an inextricable link with the Incarnation and the participation of the human person for the grace of continually increasing union with God as exemplified by Mary.²² The relational nature of a

²⁰ Yves Congar, "The Motherhood in God and the Femininity of the Holy Spirit," in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit Volume III*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 155, 160.

²¹ Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 228.

²² LaCugna, *God for Us*, 210, 216, 244-249. LaCugna affirms that the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not one of subordination resulting from begetting of the Son and bringing forth of the Spirit, but one of perfect intra-divine, perichoretic communion that holds together three co-equal Persons and situates them in the economy

Trinitarian God invites human beings into the *imago Dei*, at the heart of which is the flourishing of human personhood, relationship, and communion, all foundations of feminist theological anthropology. LaCugna rejects a theology of complementarity that extrapolates from gender differences the woman's role as private and domestic, and the man's as public leadership and headship. She disagrees that God has eternally decreed that men are superior, and women inferior."²³ LaCugna's conviction serves as a foundation for what Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Johnson, Bahar Davary and other contemporary feminists have to instruct.

1.1.2.2 Rosemary Ruether's Preference for the Spirit-Sophia in Identifying the Femininity of God

For Rosemary Radford Ruether, identifying the Holy Spirit with the feminine aspect of God is problematic because a Trinitarian God with two male Persons and one female Person falls into the realm of androcentricism where the feminine side of God becomes the subordinate principle. In this formulation, that which is feminine can only be mediating or receiving, but never represent the fullness of divine transcendence. Ruether claims it is necessary to go beyond the notion of the "feminine side" of God by identifying this side directly with the Sophia-Spirit and to question whether the highest symbol of divine sovereignty is still exclusively male.²⁴

A brief detour into the Sophia-Spirit and the link to Mary is the Wisdom theology of Eastern Orthodoxy. The Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov advanced the idea that Wisdom is the all-encompassing divine ground of being from which the Trinity emerges.²⁵ He claims that Wisdom's being governs the whole process of creation and redemption, and is visible in the maternity of Mary. Therefore, according to Bulgakov, the source of redemption of

of salvation. A "human person," however, differs from a "Trinitarian Person" in those attributes and capacities that pertain to the finitude of human nature, potential, and identity. Human persons are created *imago Dei*, but are only expressions of the divine. They share the human nature of Christ, but not his divine nature.

²³ LaCugna, *God for Us*, 267.

²⁴ Rosemary R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 61.

²⁵ Rosemary R. Ruether, *Mary—The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 45.

humanity is both Jesus and Mary together.²⁶ Mary's role in the Incarnation and Redemption is undeniable, but Bulgakov's position blurs the distinction between the persons of the Holy Spirit and Mary, and the difference in the redeeming privileges of Jesus and his mother. He thinks that the limits of the creature are surpassed in the deification of Mary and that her life of grace is the hypostatic life of the Holy Spirit (again, this theologically problematic). He, however, restates his extreme position by rejecting any suggestion of an incarnation of the Spirit in *Maria: Studies on the Holy Virgin* (B. Schultze, Volume VI, Book VIII, Chapter IV, 231). He writes, "[The Spirit] abides, however, in the ever-Virgin Mary as in a holy temple while her human personality seems to become transparent to [the Spirit] and to provide [the Spirit] with a human countenance."²⁷

Michael Debus notes that devotion to Mary in Russian Orthodoxy is rooted in the idea that she is the created Sophia who became a human being.²⁸ With respect to the Trinity, the church fathers identified the *uncreated* Sophia with either the Holy Spirit, or the Logos-Christ. Augustine added the created Sophia, a perspective unique to him, describing her as created before time. "This identification of Sophia with the Logos, a spiritual being who incarnated in a human being, had consequences in Russia Orthodoxy in that over time people began to think of Sophia as a spiritual being who also incarnated in a human being, in Mary."²⁹ Bulgakov's synthesis of Mary in the sophiological plan is her special relationship with the Holy Spirit. In *The Orthodox Church*, he writes,

²⁶ Ruether, *Mary*, 45.

²⁷ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Wisdom of God* (London, 1937), 176, in *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Michael O'Carroll (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988), 91.

²⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path, CW 4* (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1995), 159, in *Mary and Sophia: The Feminine Element in the Spiritual Evolution of Humanity*, Michael Debus, trans. Jutta Tiegeler and James H. Hindes (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2013), 124.

²⁹ Debus, *Mary and Sophia*, 125-126.

In her is realized the idea of divine Wisdom in the creation of the world, she is Divine Wisdom in the created world. It is in her that Divine Wisdom is justified, and thus the veneration of the Virgin blends with that of Divine Wisdom... She is the justification, the end and the meaning of creation.³⁰

Why Ruether prefers to identify the feminine side of God with the Spirit-Sophia is unclear. In Eastern Orthodoxy, the Spirit-Sophia over time became associated with the feminine—with Mary and her maternity. In the New Testament, however, Wisdom is the Son who reveals the Father; therefore, Wisdom is Christ.³¹ In both cases, the appropriation of Spirit-Sophia falls into the realm of gender stereotyping that Ruether herself finds problematic.

1.1.2.3 Elizabeth Johnson's Relational Understanding of the *Imago Dei*

Like LaCugna, Elizabeth Johnson has a relational understanding of the *imago Dei*. She emphasizes that God did not just create the human person as male and female, but as social beings in relation characterized by mutuality, equality, respect for difference, and unity in diversity. In *Truly Our Sister*, she finds Leonardo Boff's situating Mary within her context in service to others as revealing the femininity of God problematic. For Boff, this divinization is accomplished in the historical union of the Spirit with Mary, casting her as the salvific feminine complement to the masculine Jesus in a dualistic anthropology.³² Johnson also finds a contradiction in Boff's presentation of the *Magnificat*. On one hand, he portrays Mary as arising from the *comunidades de base* where one encounters situations of dire poverty, violence, and oppression. On the other, he portrays her as an assertive woman who denounces oppression and critically proclaims liberation as a sign of God's mercy, inspiring the efforts of the marginalized in their liberation struggle. This liberating image of Mary, Johnson argues, does not automatically locate her in solidarity with the experiences of ordinary women.³³

³⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (London: The Centenary Press, 1935), 139, in O'Carroll, *Theotokos*, 91.

³¹ Congar, "Motherhood in God," 156, 163 n. 9.

³² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 56.

³³ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 57.

Instead, Johnson claims that Mary's perpetual virginity that has been the subject of much debate over the centuries takes on a "strangely liberating power." Through the ages, women have been relegated to positions complementary to man. Their worth is defined by their ability to bear children as though motherhood is the only expression of womanhood. Johnson affirms that Mary is a woman whose worth is not dependent on or defined by man, but by her God alone. In saying "yes" to God's invitation, she assented to the totality of herself as a woman who acted with integrity from her own being. How is this liberating for women who choose other vocations in life? Johnson claims that calling Mary "perpetual virgin" encourages women to relate to the world with freedom. She writes that many Asian women have come to realize that "when a woman defines herself according to her own understanding of who she really is and what she is meant for in this universe (and not according to the rules and norms of patriarchy), she is a virgin. Therefore, her virginity persists in spite of sexual experience, childbearing, and increasing age. Actually her virginity, her ability to be a self-defining woman, grows because of her full range of life experience."³⁴ Poor women, too, find this understanding of Mary's autonomy and prophetic spirit comforting in their own struggles against injustice.

1.1.2.4 Bahar Davary on Maryam and Fatima's Independence and Agency

Representing Islamic scholarship, Bahar Davary points out that the significance of Maryam and her Islamic counterpart, Fatima, extend beyond their submissiveness and piety. For many Catholic Christians, whether as a result of devotion to the Mother of God, her honorific titles, or in relation to her numerous apparitions worldwide, the experience of Mary in popular piety carries significant political, ethical and ecclesiological implications. For instance, Davary

³⁴ Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), 20. Cited in *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, Chung Hyun Kyung (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 77 (also see chapter 1, n. 21) in Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 32.

notes the political interpretation in an address of John Paul II of the Virgin's apparitions at Fátima as contributing to the eventual demise of Communism.³⁵ Similarly, during and after the 1978-79 revolution in Iran, Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, was viewed not just as the traditional mother of the Imams, but as an avant-garde woman far more outspoken than her husband, 'Ali.³⁶ Therefore, both Mary and Fatima not only signify submission and chastity, but also female independence and agency. Egyptian author Aisha Abd al-Rahman uses the example of Mary's obedience and submission to explicate the concept of women's emancipation as a moral foundation within an Islamic framework. For al-Rahman (pen name, Bint al-Shati'), an Islamic model of feminine virtue includes piety, devotion, modesty, sacrifice, heroism, loyalty, and patience based on the theological premise that if women do not have free choice, their moral and religious responsibilities cannot be guaranteed.³⁷ For a number of contemporary Muslim scholars, Maryam's story both strikes at patriarchal foundations as well as contributes to a prophetic authority that she shares with her son, Isa, one that is no longer androcentric, but gynocentric as well.

These are only a few feminist perspectives. This thesis draws out other feminist voices in subsequent chapters. Continuing the theme of liberation, the decades following Vatican II witnessed the growth of a theology of liberation in Latin America that gradually transferred to other global contexts. Relevant to this study is the role of the Spirit in liberation mariology discussed next.

³⁵ Mary F. Thurlkill, *Chosen among Women: Mary and Fatima in Medieval Christianity and Shi'ite Islam* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 122, in "Mary in Islam: 'No Man Could Have Been Like This Woman,'" Bahar Davary, *New Theology Review* 23, no. 3 (August 2010): 31.

³⁶ Women's participation in the Iran Revolution in 1979 was unprecedented. Countering Mohammad Reza Shah's westernization, Ayatollah Khomeini sought to preserve motherhood as one of the moral markers of Islamic society modeled on the example of Fatima. The revolution portrayed Fatima as a militant leader with the power to unify Iranian society against Western influence.

³⁷ Khaleel Muhammed and Andrew Rippin, eds., *Coming to Terms with the Qur'an* (North Haledon: Islamic Publications International, 2008), 186-187, in Davary, "Mary in Islam," 32-33.

1.1.3 Action of the Spirit through Mary in the Work of Liberation³⁸

Different contextual situations give different meaning to the word 'liberation.' The poor of Latin America seek liberation from oligarchs, economic depression, persecution, and the persistence of violence. Today Guatemalans and Hondurans are fleeing ruling dictators who have impoverished the masses over decades. In Asia, the poor seek liberation from their dire living conditions, and from the very oppressive social structures set up to protect them. Young girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan seek liberation from the Taliban that denies them their fundamental rights like access to basic education. For far too long, countries in Africa have shown no signs of emancipation from death-defying living conditions and the brutality of morally bankrupt leaders who have overstayed their time in positions of power.

The poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed are, however, not limited only to the Latin American, Asian, and African contexts where the shadow of the cross is long. The excluded and the ignored also reside in the world's richest countries where women, children, the elderly, and those with disability face all kinds of abuses. In *Mary: Shadow of Grace*, Megan McKenna writes that throughout the world the shadow of the cross is in streets, neighborhoods, and people's lives marked by violence, poverty, drug and alcohol addiction, divorce, single parenthood, crime, jail and prison, lost jobs, underemployment, insecurity, and other types of suffering that leave them in despair. She writes that the shadow of the cross also falls on the evils of abortion, physician-assisted suicide, the death penalty, weapons of mass destruction, the ravages of war, and genocide rooted in racism, classism, and nationalism.³⁹ Women the world over seek liberation from the daily injustices encountered in patriarchal family models, the workplace, and

³⁸ Also see Flynn M. Fernandes, "Mary: Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of All Graces, and Advocate of the People of God: An Interdisciplinary Exposition and Evaluation of the Proposed Fifth Marian Dogma" (STL Thesis, Boston College, 2015). There is a section on liberation mariology in the postscript.

³⁹ Megan McKenna, *Mary: Shadow of Grace* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 115-116, in Fernandes, "Mary," 78.

even ecclesial ministry and leadership. The desire for emancipation from these and other unmentioned situations of oppression stems from the need to uphold human dignity and personhood. In their despair, people turn to God in Jesus Christ petitioning his divine mercy and help for a way out of their present predicament. The Marian devout also turn to Mary seeking her prayers and intercession for their liberation.

In *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, José Comblin writes that the Holy Spirit prepared the way for the Messiah through Mary. In the Incarnation story, it is through Mary that the actions of the Spirit prepared Israel and other nations of the earth to receive their liberation by the Messiah. At the prayer vigil in the cenacle, and on Pentecost morning when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the apostles, Mary served as the link between the Spirit's work in her and the Spirit's action in her Son in history. Jesus came to share the condition of the oppressed and to deliver them from their oppressors. Comblin writes that after the Ascension, he sent his Spirit by two routes to continue his mission of liberation and salvation. First, the Spirit is constantly preparing people to receive Christ. In anticipation of the peace and communion of the end times, the Spirit has also emerged through the Church that had its birth at Pentecost in the presence of Mary.⁴⁰ Second, the liberating action of the Spirit manifests itself in Marian apparitions the majority of which have occurred in contexts of economic poverty, oppression by those in power, or where there is a crisis of faith or impending national calamity. Mary has reportedly appeared in these places expressing her solicitude for the needs of people.⁴¹

Brazilian theologians Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer claim that Mary has much symbolism for women marginalized in daily situations of life. They articulate a feminist theology

⁴⁰ José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 180-182.

⁴¹ Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and Its Religious Expressions*, trans. Robert R. Barr and John W. Diercksmeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 186.

that is human-centered, unifying, realist, and pluridimensional.⁴² They claim that only a human-centered anthropology does justice to Mary, women, men, and ultimately humanity created *imago Dei*. In the past, theologians wrote from the perspective of a male-centered anthropology that concealed the role of women in scripture and subordinated their activity to that of men. Gebara and Bingemer have pushed for a Marian theology based on a unifying anthropology that brings women and men together to share the concerns and joys of everyday existence giving deeper meaning to the Incarnation. They insist that such a theology must be realist in that Mary of devotion enters into dialogue with the signs of the times recognizing space, culture, problems, and the personhood of those who relate to her figure. Lastly, it requires a pluridimensional approach in which various aspects of relationship to Mary can occur without excluding others.⁴³

Islamic Shi'a hagiography portrays Maryam and Fatima as manifestations of the holy sufferer because both their sons suffered persecution and hardship.⁴⁴ These women lost their sons to *kufra* or the "covering of the truth" by authoritarian religious figures of the time. Davary notes that though Islamic christology does not include the crucifixion and the resurrection, it does recount the suffering of Isa, and his mother. Isa was sentenced to death by the state for perceived treason and intransigence about the truth. Hussein, son of Fatima, was killed along with seventy-two family members and companions for resisting the tyranny of Caliph Yazid (7th century). While Thurlkill has drawn parallels between Mary and Fatima's independence and agency, as well as their submission and chastity, their joint image as mother of sorrows is where their stories most deeply converge.⁴⁵

⁴² Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 3.

⁴³ Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary*, 3-12.

⁴⁴ Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 35, in Davary, "Mary in Islam," 32.

⁴⁵ Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, 27, 39, in Davary, "Mary in Islam," 32.

Her relationships characterize Mary's identity not only in scripture and tradition, but in the concrete reality of the everyday experiences of women, men, and children as well. After her Transitus and Assumption, Mary continued these relationships with humanity by intervening at particular moments of history. Chapter 2 looks at some of the characteristics of her reported appearances and the themes of her messages. Among the trends observed is an affinity for people and communities on the margins of society. Guadalupe, Vailankanni, La Salette, Lourdes, Fátima, Kibeho, and other reported apparitions expose her as a champion of Christ's preferential option for the poor. The Mary who allegedly appeared at these locations is not a passive woman, but one who emboldens and empowers her visionaries to carry out her wishes and propagate her messages. She physically identifies and binds herself to the excluded, protecting them, affirming their dignity and personhood, and remaining an abiding presence wherever belief in God is threatened or ignored.⁴⁶

Like the *comunidades de base* that arose during the flourishing of liberation theology, the post-Vatican II Church saw the revival of old and emergence of new movements (the *Movimenti*). The birth and growth of the Catholic Charismatic Movement as a contemporary manifestation of the Spirit's activity in the world church is one of these movements discussed next.

1.1.4 The Catholic Charismatic Renewal

One of the developments after Vatican II was the birth of new ecclesial movements that attributed their charisms to the Holy Spirit. Some of these movements have a Marian character resulting from a particular spiritual experience or an apparition.⁴⁷ Chapter 6 identifies some of these movements and their growth, but focuses on apparitions themselves as Marian movements. Addressed here is the emergence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR).

⁴⁶ Fernandes, "Mary," 73-74.

⁴⁷ Robert Hogan, "Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal," *Marian Library Studies* 30, no. 6 (2011-2012): 277.

Though the CCR started in 1967, it was not until the 1980s that its Marian dimension renewed the focus on devotion to Mary. Up until the early 1980s, the charismatic renewal of the Church had only seen an influx of new experiences and teachings from the classic Pentecostals on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, glossolalia, prophecy, healings, and other ministerial gifts of the Spirit. Neo-pentecostal churches emphasized the renewal of parishes and local communities. The Catholic Church pushed experience and teaching on order and community in the development of these covenant communities, but the specific elements emphasized by the Catholic Church—the Eucharist, Mary, and the Pope in union with the bishops—had not entered into the mainstream of the charismatic renewal.⁴⁸ This subsection addresses the Marian aspect in pneumatological perspective as it relates to the CCR and the language of a “new Pentecost.”

In the July 1975 issue of the *New Covenant*, Gerald Farrell and George Kosicki point out that in the new Pentecost it is the Spirit at work in Mary providing *new* wisdom and *new* power to accomplish Christ’s salvific work. Mary continues her cooperation as an instrument of the Spirit, advancing the church in the reign of God. Laurentin shares his perspective on the CCR in “Mary, the Model Charismatic,” a chapter in his book *Catholic Pentecostalism*. He asserts that the CCR, in a special way, could shed light on Mary’s presence in the Church from the very first outpouring of the Spirit. He writes, “The charismatic renewal has made an authentic rediscovery of Mary; now it must learn to express Mary’s Spirit-animated presence in the communion of saints in a way that is faithful to the experience of the movement itself, which is so truly biblical and ecumenical and which will not be satisfied with mere words.”⁴⁹ He stresses that Mary’s role

⁴⁸ Gerald J. Farrell and George W. Kosicki, *The Spirit and the Bride Say “Come!” Mary’s Role in the New Pentecost* (Asbury: AMI Press, 1981), 22-23.

⁴⁹ René Laurentin, *Catholic Pentecostalism* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1966), 194, in Hogan, “Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal,” 347.

is at the heart of Christianity and the Church ought to pay attention because the CCR is helping to restore the proper focus on Mary as the model of a spiritual person in relation to Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church.⁵⁰

Robert Hogan affirms that the CCR is specifically concerned with spiritual experience and its influence on the growth and renewal of the Church.⁵¹ To stress this point, he quotes a homily where Suenens stressed Mary's role as model and helper to God:

Unity in the Spirit is in our unity with Mary, the mother of God. Christ was born out of the Spirit by the cooperation of Mary. On the day of Pentecost, the Church was born the same way. Mary was there helping the apostles to receive the Spirit of God. May we be simple children of Mary, the woman, and open all that we are to the fullness of the Spirit of God.⁵²

What is Mary's role in preparing the Church for a new Pentecost today when the Church has entered a time of tribulation? The Catholic Church today faces the scourge of the sex abuse scandal and the persecution of Christians in many parts of the world. Even in these difficult times, Farrell and Kosicki affirm that the Spirit is constantly speaking to the Church. Some of the ways in which the Spirit communicates is through sacred scripture, the teaching authority, and private revelations.⁵³ Mary's role in God's plan for a cosmic renewal of the Church under the influence of the Holy Spirit is the subject of Chapter 2. The case studies in Chapters 3-5 are specific examples where the Spirit has mobilized some form of ecclesial renewal through an apparition or manifestation of Mary. The Church has played an essential role in the discernment of spirits in the area of apparitions and manifestations, ascertaining the authenticity of these revelations. Through her, the Spirit manifests an outpouring of God's merciful love in the form of miraculous cures, healings, and conversions to Christ.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Laurentin, *Catholic Pentecostalism*, 195-196, in Hogan, "Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal," 348.

⁵¹ Hogan, "Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal," 249.

⁵² *New Covenant* (July 1973), 11. Excerpts of Cardinal Léon-Josef Suenens' homily at the 1973 Notre Dame international conference, in Hogan, "Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal," 277.

⁵³ Farrell and Kosicki, *Spirit and the Bride*, 72.

⁵⁴ Farrell and Kosicki, *Spirit and the Bride*, 51.

What is the Spirit is saying through these messages conveyed by Mary in preparing the people of God for a new Pentecost? First, Farrell and Kosicki argue that some in the CCR are predisposed to listening to Mary's words because they ring like prophecies. There are also those who are indifferent to these messages because their source of faith is Scripture, not private revelation.⁵⁵ Second, heeding the content and acting on the exhortations in the messages of Marian revelations, enriched by a prayerful study of Scripture, is one aspect of the Spirit's work of purification that prepares the faithful for a new Pentecost. This is not new. What is new is the proliferation of Marian apparitions around the world in the modern age through which the Spirit wants God's plan known and accepted by all through the mediation of Mary.⁵⁶

A final point on maintaining a healthy balance and penetrating discernment toward the role of Mary in the CCR is essential. Suenens argues that overemphasis on Mary could lead to a neglect of the Spirit. At the same time, an accent placed only on the Spirit could cause the memory of Mary to fade away. An aim of the CCR is to relive the classical Pentecostal tradition, but when it merges with other forms of Pentecostalism where Mary finds less favor, Catholics through osmosis could develop an attitude of indifference. Recognition of Mary's role, and all that the Spirit has accomplished in her, will not only create a disposition of ecumenical sensitivity but also help the movement advance one of its key objectives of Christian unity in the new Pentecost.⁵⁷

1.1.5 Proliferation of Marian Apparitions in the 19th and 20th Centuries

The introduction drew attention to the fact that after Vatican II, the number of theological works on Mary declined for a host of different reasons. However, there was no

⁵⁵ Farrell and Kosicki, *Spirit and the Bride*, 39-40. Some in the charismatic renewal find Mary's role in the economy of salvation and Marian apparition messages problematic for ecumenism.

⁵⁶ LG §62, in Farrell and Kosicki, *Spirit and the Bride*, 42.

⁵⁷ Suenens, *New Pentecost?* 210.

noticeable decline among the Marian devout. In fact, there may have even been a resurgence of interest in Mary among the Catholic faithful. One possible explanation for this resurgence is the increase in the number of Marian apparitions taking place in the latter half of the twentieth century. After the initial cluster of apparition claims in the first half of the twentieth century (Dong Lu, Mantara, Hrushiv, Fátima, Beauraing, Banneux, Kerizinen, Amsterdam, Montichiari, and Necedah), there was a lull in appearances of Mary for almost two decades until the next burst beginning in the mid-to-late 1960s. Jerusalem (1954) and Garabandal (1960-1965) are the only other alleged cases in the relatively quiet period.⁵⁸ A year after the council, Mary reportedly returned to Montichiari (1966). Two years later, there were serial Marian manifestations at Zeitoun (1968-1971). Bayside (1970), Akita (1973-1981) and Betania (1976-1990) began in the seventies with reports that these apparitions extended into the eighties. There was no year in the 1980s when there was no report of Mary's appearance in some part of the world. Cuapa (1980), Medjugorje (1981-present), Kibeho (1981-1989), Damascus (1982-1990), San Nicholas (1983-1990), Naju (1985), again Hrushiv (1987), and Cuenca (1988-1990), all allegedly took place in the eighties, and then there was a report of Mary's repeat visit to Dong Lu (1995).⁵⁹

Even though claims regarding appearances of Mary have been advanced since the time of the early church, most claims of such apparitions have received ecclesiastical repudiation. This is an indication that the church takes such matters seriously, exercising a cautious approach and preferring to wait before initiating an investigation or passing judgment. The whole process takes several years, even decades. In the meantime, this phenomenon presents the faithful with a paradox. On one hand, the church advises the faithful to exercise prudence or even cautions

⁵⁸ The Miracle Hunter, http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/index.html.

⁵⁹ The Miracle Hunter, http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/index.html.

against visiting these sites before receiving episcopal approval.⁶⁰ On the other, the cult that Marian apparitions attract, and the spiritual fruits they bear in terms of increased devotion and piety, generally propel the ecclesiastical hierarchy toward a favorable declaration. Even where there has been no decision on an apparition, the church's approval is implicit in papal visits to the shrine or basilica, the crowning of an icon or statue at the site, the declaration of a feast in honor of the apparition, or some other sign of approbation.⁶¹

In *Encountering Mary*, Sandra Zimdars-Swartz writes of a Catholic sub-culture tied to Marian cosmology that today exists as a “church within a church,” transforming peasant Catholicism into an apocalyptic mysticism concerning end times.⁶² A visible sign of this sub-culture is Marian pilgrimages that have become an invitation to the pious and the curious. Millions of the faithful flock to these sites of Marian apparitions where basilicas now enshrine the reported location of her appearance. Along these sacred landscapes, one can also visit the homes of visionaries many transformed into museums, as well as springs, streams, trees, and rocks that have become enduring cosmic symbols of the apparition narrative. At these sanctuaries like at local parishes, pilgrims can offer Masses for their intentions for a modest payment. A part of the today's pilgrimage experience is the inevitable encounter with capitalism from pilgrimage tours to the selling of every kind of souvenir. The vicinity of these shrines is crowded with shops selling medals, miniature bottles of blessed water, prayer books, prayer cards, religious objects, rosaries, scapulars, as well as other souvenirs. On one hand, pilgrims make shopping for these souvenirs a part of their experience so that they have something to

⁶⁰ Michael O'Carroll, “Apparitions of Our Lady,” in *Mary is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*, eds. William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1997), 280; Fernandes, “Mary,” 27.

⁶¹ George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 186-187; Fernandes, “Mary,” 27.

⁶² Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 166.

bring back home to their loved ones, relatives, and friends. On the other, this commercialization of Marian piety distracts from the spiritual purpose of pilgrimage.

The five aspects of this discourse are not mutually exclusive. For instance, apparitions have led to growth in Marian devotion and piety as well as to the emergence of new movements within the church. They draw attention to the marginalized and the need for their spiritual and material liberation. They have implications for Catholic-Evangelical unity as well as the Church's relations with world religions. From a feminist perspective, they are liberating when they address issues of gender equality and social justice in all realms of human existence, an issue central to the *imago Dei*. Where and when they celebrate submissiveness as a model of the feminine or motherhood as symbolic of the feminine ideal, they only serve to perpetuate a self-serving patriarchal mariology. Before turning to a study of the phenomenon of apparitions in more detail in Chapter 2, a review of some of the scriptural, ecumenical, interreligious, and ecclesiastical foundations for understanding the Spirit's action in Mary is necessary.

1.2 Foundations of the Action of the Holy Spirit in Mary in Catholic Theology

Ordinary Catholics in the pew think of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of Jesus or the Mother of God. They are not accustomed to thinking of her in terms of the Holy Spirit or her relationship to the Church. According to Suenens, they do not see Mary as the image of the Holy Spirit, or that it is through her that they get a glimpse of the Third Person of the Trinity. Some mariologists have claimed, however, that there is no more ideal an image of the Spirit than the Virgin Mary.⁶³ From the moment of her *fiat* at the Annunciation, Mary became the instrument and interpreter of the Holy Spirit. The belief that the Spirit's action in Mary is more perfect than is commonly supposed led St. Louis-Marie de Montfort⁶⁴ to affirm that "practical ignorance about the Holy Ghost actually originates in the neglect of Mary" without claiming that "all contact with the Holy Spirit presupposes a conscious and intentional recourse to Mary."⁶⁵

Spirit-Mary Unity: Scriptural, Ecumenical, Interreligious, and Ecclesiastical Foundations

This section is a lookback at some of the scriptural, ecumenical, interreligious, and ecclesiastical foundations of the action of the Holy Spirit in the person of Mary.

1.2.1. The Spirit's Revelation of God's Divine Plan through Mary in Scripture

Christian Scripture is replete with the action of the Holy Spirit as the communication of God's word for humanity, at times providing foresight into the future. In *Understanding the Mother of Jesus*, Carroll writes that the Spirit's manifestation at the Annunciation resulted in a new

⁶³ Léon-Josef Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate of the Legion of Mary* (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1979), 26-27.

⁶⁴ St. Louis-Marie de Montfort often thought of Mary entirely relative to the Spirit and wanted to call his Company of Mary the *Community of the Holy Spirit* that later served as the inspiration for the Legion of Mary. The pioneers of the charismatic renewal of the twentieth century owe much to this earlier movement. Léon-Josef Suenens was the first bishop to get involved with the Legion with Paul VI entrusting its guidance to him. On an international level, Pierre Goursat founded the Emmanuel, the largest of charismatic communities. See *Jesus Living in Mary: Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, Louis Marie de Montfort, Alphonse Bossard, and Stefano de Fiores (Bay Shore: Montfort Publications, 1995), 493.

⁶⁵ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate of the Legion of Mary*, 27.

creation when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. The Spirit overshadowed her affecting in her the virginal conception of Jesus that gave him his human nature. Led by the Spirit during his ministry, Jesus forms for himself a mystical body that is his Church at the inception of which Mary was present.⁶⁶ Rather than discuss the Spirit's action at every moment in the life of the Virgin, the trajectory below is limited to four key moments when we hear Mary's voice or of her suffering in the New Testament, and of her presence at Pentecost. The three scenes where she speaks are the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the wedding at Cana, respectively signifying her disposition of faith, service and solidarity, and discipleship. She remains silent in her grief near the cross at Calvary, and during the vigil and on the morning of the Pentecost, both scenes also symbolic of her discipleship. James Kroeger, whose writing juxtaposes scholarship and devotion, is balanced with the feminist perspective of Elizabeth Johnson.

1.2.1.1 The Annunciation and Virginal Conception

The mystery of the Incarnation unfolds through the power of the Holy Spirit when angel Gabriel announces to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Luke 1:35). In this moment Kroeger writes, a new level of consciousness moved Mary as she became aware of her role in this mystery that life, filled with the Spirit, would spring forth from her. Mary's *fiat* was an unqualified assent first given in silence, and then in the words: "Here I am, servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). From that moment Kroeger affirms, Mary shared a unique and personal relationship with the Spirit for the accomplishment of the Incarnation.⁶⁷ Following Michael O'Carroll, Kroeger states that their

⁶⁶ Carroll, *Understanding the Mother of Jesus*, 67-68.

⁶⁷ Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 138-140. Kroeger draws on John Paul II's *Dominum et vivificantem* and *Redemptoris mater* to explicate the Spirit's action in Mary.

relationship endured far beyond the momentary virginal conception of Jesus. O'Carroll writes, "The Holy Spirit abides in the ever-Virgin Mary as in a holy temple, while her human personality seems to become transparent to Him."⁶⁸ In receiving the fundamental charism of the gift of the Spirit, Mary on her part gave the Spirit total freedom to act in her life and in her person.⁶⁹

In *Dangerous Memories: A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture*, Johnson emphasizes Mary's humanity. Mary uses her own intellect when she asks the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34) She dismisses any sexual interpretation of Luke's text (such as Mary being impregnated by the Spirit of God) to justify Jesus having a human mother and a divine father. Words like "comes upon" (*eperchesthai*) and "overshadows" (*episkiazein*) indicate the presence of God who empowers and protects. Overshadowing means God is always nearby, saving and protecting and is devoid of any sexual connotation, an insight Johnson says the ecumenical authors of *Mary in the New Testament* (Raymond Brown, et al.) support.⁷⁰ The key import of the Annunciation is that by cooperating with the Spirit, Mary paves the way for the coming of Jesus. She experiences God's grace in her life by entering into a deep relationship with the Spirit.⁷¹

Johnson argues that a patriarchal interpretation of Mary's "yes" as submissive obedience not only diminishes women's dignity, it also does not accurately reflect Mary's disposition. When Mary hears the voice of God commissioning her to a burdensome task, she exercises her own intellect. She asks questions, discerns the angel's response, and makes a decision freely. Hers was not a yes of self-denial, nor a passive, timid reaction, but an autonomous act that encourages and endorses women's efforts to take responsibility for their own lives.⁷²

⁶⁸ O'Carroll, *Theotokos*, 332, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 140.

⁶⁹ Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 141.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Dangerous Memories: A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 89-90. *Eperchesthai* in Greek means the movement of people or things; *episkiazein* means to cast a shadow on something.

⁷¹ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 89-93.

⁷² Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 96, 98.

1.2.1.2 The Visitation and the Magnificat

Kroeger writes of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the story of the Visitation chronicled in Luke 1:39-45. Mary, filled with the Spirit, undertakes a difficult journey to the hill country with a living sense of mission and service to her cousin, Elizabeth, who in her old age is already six-months pregnant “for nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). When Mary greets Elizabeth upon entering Zechariah’s house, the child in her cousin’s womb leaps. Elizabeth responds with the beatitude: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:43). Luke notes that Elizabeth, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit (1:42) upon the Visitation by Mary. Now, Kroeger affirms, two women filled with the Spirit share their faith in the unfolding of God’s salvific plan in which they both would soon be mothers, one of the precursor of the Messiah, the other of the Messiah himself.⁷³

The Canticle of Mary known as the *Magnificat* is a sublime example of authentic prayer inspired by the Spirit. Kroeger writes that this song, sung daily during Vespers and recalled during the liturgy on Marian feasts, is one that includes gratitude, praise, social awareness, and commitment. It is a synopsis of how God plans to unravel the plan of salvation, and what role Mary is to play in its unfolding.⁷⁴ He claims the Church looks to Mary to understand the meaning of her own mission. Her canticle expresses the depth of her faith in the God who saves, who is the source of every gift, and who manifests a preference for the poor and lowly.⁷⁵

Johnson reflects that the overall structure and theme of the Magnificat is one of thanksgiving because it lists the reasons of gratitude—God’s divine mercy and God’s liberation of the oppressed.⁷⁶ Mary rejoices in God her Savior who offers strength to those in pain and

⁷³ Kroeger, “Holy Spirit and Mary,” 141-142.

⁷⁴ Kroeger, “Holy Spirit and Mary,” 142-144.

⁷⁵ RM §37, in Kroeger, “Holy Spirit and Mary,” 144.

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 108. Johnson writes that Mary’s Magnificat is an example of other canticles of the Jewish tradition sung by Miriam (Exod 15:2-21), Deborah (Judg 5:1-31), Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10), and Judith (Jth 16:1-

suffering. God's compassion extends worldwide to the liberation of the poor from their oppressors.⁷⁷ Johnson argues that God's bringing down the mighty from their thrones supports women's struggle against male domination as well as racism, heterosexism, classism, and other forms of injustice. The song projects her as one who stands up against those who oppress the lowly, who expresses her solidarity with the marginalized by stepping outside a patriarchal stronghold and sings prophetically about what is to come.⁷⁸

While the Magnificat is the high point of the Visitation, Mary's purpose and disposition of service for visiting Elizabeth must not be lost. The outpouring of the Spirit on Mary and Elizabeth takes place in domestic space free of male presence. They need each other to share the good things God has done in their lives, and God's path for their offspring in the plan of salvation. Susan Ross points out that their experience is one of female solidarity where each looks to the other rather than to men for validation of their authority.⁷⁹

1.2.1.3 The Wedding at Cana

John 2:1-11 manifests Mary's openness to the Spirit even though there is no explicit mention of the Holy Spirit in this text on the wedding at Cana. Both Paul VI and John Paul II assert that Mary's prompting of Jesus to perform his first miracle, despite his initial hesitation, was Spirit-inspired. According to Paul VI, it was the Spirit that urged Mary to request her Son to perform his first miracle, marking the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.⁸⁰ John Paul II claims that Cana manifests "a new kind of motherhood according to the Spirit," one that

17). They sang dangerous songs of salvation and victory of the oppressed, as well as of thanksgiving. The Magnificat follows in the same tradition expressing deep personal love of God and praise of God's justice.

⁷⁷ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 109-110.

⁷⁸ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 118-119.

⁷⁹ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 103.

⁸⁰ Paul VI, "The Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin," *The Pope Speaks* 20 (May 13, 1975): 103, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 146.

expresses Mary's solicitude for the needy.⁸¹ A second pneumatological theme is that Cana foreshadows the Pentecost. Kroeger notes that only in John 2:1 and Acts 1:14 is the expression "the mother of Jesus" used. When the old wine ran out, the disciples and the "mother of Jesus" ask for new wine of the Spirit that through Jesus' command is available in abundance.⁸² This sensitivity and compassion for human needs that results in the outpouring of the Spirit is thematically included in the liturgical Preface for Our Lady of Cana:

With loving care for the bridegroom and his bride, she turns to her Son for help and tells the servants to do what he commands. Water is changed into wine [and] the wedding guests rejoice... In this great sign, the presence of the Messiah is proclaimed, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is foretold, and the hour of salvation is foreshadowed.

In the Cana narrative, Johnson writes that Mary has an important symbolic function. Her discipleship makes her a collective personality symbolic of the church, but scholars opine differently over the significance of her words and actions. Some claim she represents a true believer because of her faith; others claim her faith is imperfect because she sees Jesus only as a miracle-worker, and is unwilling to accept his initial hesitation. Still others see in Mary leadership attributes—she takes charge of the situation by identifying a need and initiates finding a solution. She persists till a solution is implemented. Her leadership is one that stands in solidarity with those who struggle for social justice especially the poor who, as Gebara and Bingemer point out, "have no wine, nor peace, freedom, rights, food, housing, jobs, health..." This is the plight of millions in Latin America, Asia, and Africa for whom Mary's words "they have no wine" expresses the cry of the voiceless, empowering those who are marginalized because of their economic status, race, class, color, or creed. Mary's words and actions stir the conscience

⁸¹ RM §21, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 147.

⁸² Joseph A. Grassi, "The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11): A Pentecostal Meditation?" *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 131-136, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 147.

of the people of God in the richest countries of the world to act, as well as those in the third world to act according to their means.

At Cana, Jesus initially hesitates to fulfill his mother's request stating that his hour has not yet come. Though not apparent, this ties Cana to Calvary where his hour *had* come and where Mary is once again present. What comes through at Cana is Mary's discipleship that exemplifies the apostolic witness to Christ of other women in scripture, some remembered, others forgotten. Mary's instruction "Do whatever he tells you" evangelizes the servers who follow through on the strength of her testimony.⁸³ Therefore, the Cana narrative is important for two non-mutually exclusive roles of Mary—spokesperson of the needy and apostolic witness who leads others to Christ, exemplifying that both discipleship and leadership are essential to women's vocations in the church and in the world.⁸⁴

1.2.1.4 Near the Cross at Calvary

Kroeger again recalls the writings of Paul VI and John Paul II to reflect pneumatologically on Mary's presence at Calvary. Paul VI writes:

It was the Holy Spirit who strengthened the soul of the Mother of Jesus as she stood beneath the cross, and inspired her once again, as [the Spirit] had at the Annunciation, to consent to the will of the heavenly Father who wanted her to be associated as a mother with the sacrifice her Son was offering for mankind's redemption."⁸⁵

In his encyclicals on the Divine Mercy and Mother of the Redeemer, John Paul II expresses:

No one has experienced, to the same degree as the Mother of the Crucified One, the mystery of the Cross ... that together with her definitive *fiat*⁸⁶ ... is the obedience of faith shown by Mary ... And how powerful too is the action of grace in her soul, how all-pervading is the influence of the Holy Spirit and of [the Spirit's] light and power.⁸⁷

⁸³ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 144, 150.

⁸⁴ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 151.

⁸⁵ Paul VI, "Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin," 103, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 148.

⁸⁶ John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia* §9, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 149.

⁸⁷ RM §18, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 149.

Mary's fiat ties Calvary to the Annunciation. Suenens argues that her surrender and consent did not remain on the level of her initial response, but grew through her tribulation at the cross as an actual and personal reality.⁸⁸ John 19:26-27, Kroeger claims, links Mary's spiritual motherhood to her continued openness to the Spirit. It is the culmination of three key aspects of her motherhood—biological (Incarnation), spiritual (Crucifixion), and ecclesiastical (Pentecost). Therefore, her motherhood emerges from the accomplishment of the Paschal Mystery that under the influence of the Spirit began with her active consent to God's salvific plan. Mary, the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, stands at the center of this mystery at Calvary prompting John Paul II to refer to her as the mother of humanity.⁸⁹

Mary and John the beloved disciple are depicted at the foot of the cross at Calvary in a number of icons. Johnson, however, claims that contemporary scholars believe that neither were present at the cross. John's gospel only refers to them as mother of Jesus and beloved disciple and not by name. Their facing each other in artistic expressions is symbolic of their discipleship; neither is elevated above the other, and both are representative of a larger community. This insight has theological links between Jesus' death, the gift of the Spirit, and the birth of the Christian community, Johnson writes. Even if Mary and John were not physically present at the cross, they were likely somewhere near grieving Jesus' death. Mary's grief is that of a sorrowful parent outliving her Son. Therefore, *Mater Dolorosa* is not a symbolic image, but a real person whose son faced a violent death.⁹⁰ Parents around the world who outlive their children seek solace from images of the Mater Dolorosa like the *Stabat Mater* and the *Pietà* even if these artistic icons are not accurate depictions of history. Johnson writes that these images project a "shared

⁸⁸ Suenens, *New Pentecost?*, 203, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 148.

⁸⁹ RM §23, in Kroeger, "Holy Spirit and Mary," 150.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 154-155.

Calvary” between Mary and parents in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, whose children and family members have disappeared, died, or taken political prisoners for challenging authority in the name of justice, were killed in civil wars and genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda, or executed in the United States. These sorrowful images are also liberating in that they galvanize ordinary citizens and the church to nonviolent action even when their own safety is at stake.⁹¹

1.2.1.5 The Pentecost

While some biblical scholars have written about Mary’s presence in prayer among the apostles and other believers awaiting the outpouring of the Paraclete at Pentecost, others highlight that the birth of the Church at Pentecost is a continuation of the mystery of the Incarnation under the operation of the Holy Spirit. Among the parallels between the two events, they see in both cases an overshadowing of the Spirit, with Mary alone at the Annunciation and with Mary, the apostles, and others on Pentecost Sunday. In the former, there is a biological birth of the bodily Christ while the latter gives birth to his Mystical Body. Therefore, as John Paul II points out, Mary at Nazareth and Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem, is the unique link to the Holy Spirit in that both events have their inception in Spirit (*RM* §24). Speaking of Mary’s cooperation, obedience and trust in God, Kevin McNamara writes,

At the Annunciation Mary cooperated with the Spirit in the Incarnation of the messiah, destined to be the Savior and ruler of his people; at Pentecost, she cooperated with the Spirit in the emergence of that people on to the stage of human history. She who had first become the Mother of Christ is now revealed as Mother of the Church, and central to her motherhood on each occasion are the humility, obedience and loving trust in God which unite her profoundly to the Holy Spirit.⁹²

⁹¹ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 156-157.

⁹² Kevin McNamara, “The Holy Spirit and Mary,” in *Mary in Christian Tradition: Papers of the 1984 International Congress of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, eds. David Lonsdale and Philip Sheldrake, *The Way Supplement* 51 (Autumn 1984): 13, in Kroeger, “Holy Spirit and Mary,” 152.

Hans Urs von Balthasar also holds that the Church was first present in Mary among the apostles and others in their openness to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. He writes, “Mary’s living faith is the perfect prototype of what is expected in the life of the Church.”⁹³

A number of narratives of the Pentecost only account for the presence of Mary among the twelve apostles. Scripture however accounts for a total of one hundred and twenty women and men present. These people were also disciples of Jesus who followed him around and likely did so on the way to Calvary. Johnson draws attention to the androcentric imagination of the gospel writers and interpreters. In the scene at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends on *all* present, not just Mary and the twelve apostles. Given the presence of Mary and other women, Johnson writes that one would expect more accounts of women’s leadership in preaching and prophesying in the nascent church. Luke, for instance, selectively focuses on Peter and Paul, with little regard for women’s voices in ministry. By not reporting on the others present, Johnson claims the full story of the church’s founding is incomplete. Mary and the other women together with the men present had a unique relationship to Christ. The Pentecost text does not put the spotlight on Mary, but on the Spirit who overshadows all present. They are essential to each other and are constitutive of the apostolic church. In this nascent church, Mary is one of the community that lives by the power and presence of the Spirit, commissioned to bring the gospel to other parts of the world. Therefore, the only way to have a liberating appreciation of this text, according to Johnson, is to correct what it leaves out.⁹⁴

⁹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: God’s Yes to Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 170, in Kroeger, “Holy Spirit and Mary,” 151.

⁹⁴ Johnson, *Dangerous Memories*, 160-166.

1.2.2 Ecumenical Foundations on the Holy Spirit and Mary

1.2.2.1 The Eastern Orthodox Position on the Holy Spirit and the Theotokos

Following the Great Schism of 1054, the development of mariology slowed down in those Eastern Churches not united with the Roman Catholic Church. The Eastern Orthodox tradition that gave to the Latin West the title of Mary as *theotokos*, or “God-bearer,” accords a place of honor to the Virgin in liturgy, art, and architecture. However, the Orthodox are at odds with the Latin Church for promulgating the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950), an issue that continues to be an impediment to ecumenical dialogue. Though the Orthodox Church does not accept the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, O’Carroll points out that the force of original sin which varies from person to person is reduced to a mere possibility in Mary in Orthodox teaching. Eastern Orthodoxy teaches that the Holy Spirit sanctified the Virgin Mary from the very moment of her conception, liberating her from the effects of original sin throughout her life.⁹⁵

1.2.2.2 The Protestant Position on the Holy Spirit and Mary

Mainline Protestants find Catholic Marian devotion and theological writings about Mary alien. They are not against Mary, but do object to the excesses of Catholic devotion to her. The fathers of the Reformation were deeply respectful of Mary. They accepted the designation of Mary as “bearer of God,” whose primary import for both the patristic church and for the Reformers was christological rather than mariological.⁹⁶ For instance, Daniel Migliore and others claim that Martin Luther often spoke of Mary as the “blessed Mother of God” and wrote a treatise on the Magnificat (1521). Many Lutheran churches bear her name and are more like the

⁹⁵ O’Carroll, *Theotokos*, 91. In *The Unconsumed or Unburned Bush*, Bulgakov rules out acceptance of the Immaculate Conception, preferring instead to affirm that the Virgin Mary was freed from the effects of original sin over the course of her life.

⁹⁶ Migliore, “Woman of Faith,” 117.

Eastern Orthodox in that they recognize her perpetual virginity and that she is *theotokos*.⁹⁷ John Calvin, in his gospel commentaries held that Mary was not only the holy Virgin, but also a model teacher in the faith. Honoring her does not mean bestowing lofty titles, but rather following her example of simple obedience and her witness in praise of the graces received from God.⁹⁸

In the deeply polemic period following the Reformation, Mary receded into the background in Protestant theology. Mariological developments in the Roman Catholic Church in the 19th and 20th centuries widened the chasm with Protestants. They disapproved of popular piety associated with Marian apparitions like Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fátima, and Medjugorje. Among the controversial developments were the promulgation of the 1854 and 1950 Marian dogmas as well as the debates concerning her designation as coredeempratrix and mediatrix of all graces.⁹⁹ Gaventa writes that Mary ranks high in the Protestant hierarchy of identity, but in a negative sense because they do not honor her and effusive attention to her undermines proper devotion to Christ.¹⁰⁰ To reiterate Gibson's complaint from the earlier discourse, Protestants find Mary wherever they expect the Holy Spirit in Catholic theology. They also find Catholic expressions like "To Jesus through Mary," "Mary forms Christ in us," "Mary is the link between Christ and ourselves," and "Mary is associated with the act of redemption" theologically untenable. They affirm that *only* the Holy Spirit brings humanity to Jesus, who forms Christ in souls, who unites them to Christ, and who cooperates with Christ in the work of redemption. They believe that in mariology the human Mary appears to eclipse the Divine Person.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Gress, *Marian Option*, 102.

⁹⁸ Migliore, "Woman of Faith," 117.

⁹⁹ Migliore, "Woman of Faith," 118. Wherever the title "co-redemprix" is used, it clarifies that Mary is a recipient of the redemptive righteousness by her Immaculate Conception. She "co"-operates with the Spirit in the redemption of humanity, but does not bring about salvation. The title "mediatrix" used in an instrumental sense does not place her on the same footing as Christ. Mary is the human instrument of the Spirit through whom all graces flow without taking away or adding to the dignity and efficacy of Christ as the One Redeemer and Mediator (LG §61-62).

¹⁰⁰ Gaventa, "All Generations," 121-122.

¹⁰¹ Suenens, *New Pentecost?*, 198-199.

Though Protestants do not honor Mary, they together with Catholics are reappraising their positions on the Blessed Virgin. Protestants are rereading Mary by delving into her scriptural roots while Catholics, in light of Vatican II, are trying to see her through a human lens as believer, disciple, sister, or friend without all the deeper theological underpinnings. The fact remains that the average Catholic does not understand her as the spouse of the Holy Spirit, or even what it means to be “full of grace” as the Mother of God.¹⁰² Understanding what the Spirit has accomplished in Mary as a human being is a way of advancing Catholic-Protestant unity.

1.2.3 Interreligious Foundations of Maryam of Islam and the *Rūh al-Qudus*

As Christianity makes inroads in the Global South, it comes into direct encounter with other religions. Though Hinduism emphasizes the role of goddesses, it is Islam among other faiths that has an Islamic mariology, albeit with marked differences with Catholic mariology. What follows is an overview of the place of Maryam in Islam.

Maryam (a Romanization of the Arabic مريم), daughter of ‘Imran and Hanna, is revered as one of four exalted women in traditional Sunni and Shia Islam. The only woman referred to by her proper name in the Holy Qur’an as opposed to being associated with a male figure, the Virgin Maryam is referenced therein seventy times as compared with the mere seventeen instances in the New Testament. In the Qur’an, the nineteenth chapter “Mary” (*sūrah Maryam*) is dedicated to her while her life story, seemingly influenced by the apocryphal gospels, is recounted in three Meccan chapters (19¹⁰³, 21, 23) and four Medinan chapters (3, 4, 5, 66).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Gress, *Marian Option*, 102-103.

¹⁰³ *The Glorious Qur’an*, trans. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall (Elmhurst: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, Inc., 2003), 216-222. *Sūrah Maryam* is a *Makkan* (Meccan) *sūrah*, except for ayats 57 and 71, revealed in *Al-Madinah* (Medina). Also see *Mary the Blessed Virgin of Islam*, Aliah Schleifer (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1997), 134 n. 304.

¹⁰⁴ Schleifer, *Blessed Virgin of Islam*, 64. The traditional hadiths in Sunni and Shia Islam consider Maryam one of four superior women, the others being Fatima al-Zahra (daughter of the Prophet), Khadija, the Prophet’s first wife and first woman who converted to Islam, and Asiya, wife of the Egyptian Pharaoh who retrieved Moses from the Nile.

Though the Qur'an and the hadiths emphasize Maryam's purity, Islamic mariology does not begin with the conception of Jesus, but with her genealogy and the line of prophets from which she comes, her immaculate conception, birth, early years of service in the synagogue, and then virgin birth of Jesus. Acknowledging the virgin birth, both traditions of Islam regard her as the mother of Jesus, but not the Mother of God because for Muslims, God is inconceivable. Islamic scholar Davary writes that the Qur'an refers to Mary as a woman "chosen by God above all other women" (sûrah 3:42) and that "no man could have been like this woman" (sûrah 3:36). For Islamic scholars who consider Mary to be a prophet, she has equal status to her son Isa, also revered as one of many prophets. For those who focus on her spiritual achievements, she was blessed with stages of spiritual development that approach those of the Prophet Muhammad."¹⁰⁵

The Holy Spirit (روح القدس in Arabic for *Rūh al-Qudus* meaning Spirit of "the Holy One" or Spirit of "the Exalted One") in Islam refers to the source of divine relation. According to the Islamic faith, the archangel Jibra'il is the Angel of Revelation responsible for carrying divine messages of revelation to the prophets. Though both Christianity and Islam are monotheistic faiths, the former believes in a Trinitarian God of which the Holy Spirit is the Third Person, while the latter does not personalize God because Allah is inconceivable. In Islam, the Holy Spirit is not a Person, but the *Rūh al-Qudus*, the Spirit of the Exalted One. With respect to Mary, Jaroslav Pelikan points out two principal objections of Islam to Christian belief and imagery. Islam finds the title *theotokos* offensive because of its dedication to the transcendence and otherness of God. The Qur'an says, "It does not behoove God to have a son. Too immaculate is he!"¹⁰⁶ Some Islamic scholars argue that calling Mary the "God-bearer" elevates her to the

¹⁰⁵ Schleifer, *Blessed Virgin of Islam*, 95.

¹⁰⁶ *Qur'an* 19:35, in *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*, Jaroslav J. Pelikan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 77.

Godhead. The second objection is the portrayal of Mary (of for that matter anyone, even the Prophet) in religious icons because it is not possible to conceive the divine.¹⁰⁷

According to Islamic tradition, when Mary heard of Angel Jibra'il's purpose, she immediately surrendered to her Lord's will. Jibra'il then breathed 'of the Spirit of God'¹⁰⁸ into the sleeve of her garment, and at God's command '*kun fa yakun*' ('Be! And it is'), she conceived a son who was to be called Isa.¹⁰⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim writes that from God's perspective Mary had no blemish, but "God's enemies accused her of fornication, attributing to her that which God had liberated her from, creating her to be the supreme example of the most righteous [*al-siddīqa al-kubrā*], the most preferred [*al-mustafā*] of the women of all nations."^{110, 111}

Joseph, husband of Mary, does not feature in the Qur'an possibly because it was difficult to reconcile his presence with her virginal conception, but other Islamic literature like the *Qisas* and the *Tafsir* recount his reaction to Mary's pregnancy and that only through divine intervention, he accepts Maryam's situation.¹¹² According to Islamic tradition, Mary had a natural death and was buried in the Kidron Valley at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The Christian church built over her burial site was destroyed several times, but the crypt itself remained intact and is maintained by the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem and

¹⁰⁷ Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, 77.

¹⁰⁸ Abū 'Abdullāh Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansārī Qurtubī (d. 671 AH), *Al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī li'l-Tab'at wa'l-Nashr 'an Tiba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1967/1387 (3rd print), VI, 22, in Schleifer, *Blessed Virgin of Islam*, 31. According to Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Jesus was given some of the 'Spirit' that God used in Adam's creation.

¹⁰⁹ See Schleifer, *Blessed Virgin of Islam*, 111 n. 42 for other interpretations by Qur'anic scholars on the precise instant of Maryam's conception with Isa.

¹¹⁰ Sham Al-din Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr, *Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, al-Tafsīr al-Qayyim* (Beirut: Lajnat al-Turath al-'Arabī, n.d.), 497-498, in Schleifer, *Blessed Virgin of Islam*, 70.

¹¹¹ There is no dearth of titles by which Mary is referred to in Islam. In the Qur'an, Maryam is called *al-qānitah* (she who is in submission and constant prayer and contemplation); *al-sājidah* (she who prostrates to God in worship); *al-rāki'ah* (she who bows down to God in worship); *al-tāhirah* (she who was purified); and *al-sai'mah* (she who fasts). In the hadith, she is referred to as *Batul*, *Adhraa* (Ascetic Virgin), and *Marhumah* (Enveloped in God's Mercy). For details, see *The Blessed Names of Sayyidatina Maryam*, Rahib Khattān, 111.

¹¹² *Qisas* refers to Islamic jurisprudence, *Tafsir* to Islamic exegesis usually of the Qur'an.

the Armenian Apostolic Church. A *mihrab* was built on the site for Muslims to pray. There is no record of the Assumption in the Qur'an or in any Islamic literature.

Maryam is obedient to 'the Spirit of the Exalted One,' but the Spirit's action in her person is not implicit in Islamic mariology. In Islam, Schleifer writes, Maryam is revered not only as the mother of the prophet Isa, and as a messenger, but one who is chosen to be a spiritual luminary in her own right through divine guidance, spiritual exercise, and blessings that draw her closer to God. Pelikan points out one of Mary's most significant roles in Muslim-Christian relations is serving as a bridge between Christianity and Islam.¹¹³ Her interreligious appeal, the concepts of the virgin birth and her purity serve as a "hermeneutical tool for Catholic-Muslim dialogue."¹¹⁴ Chapter 4 addresses interreligious dialogue in the context of the Marian manifestations at Zeitoun and the implications of those events for the encounter between Coptic Christians and Muslims.

1.2.4 Ecclesiastical Foundations: The Spirit, Mary, and the Church

This final foundational subsection addresses the place of Mary in the Church in light of the Holy Spirit beginning with the maximalist perspectives of two Vatican II theologians, Suenens and Congar, and the teachings of St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Léon-Josef Suenens and Yves Congar on the Spirit's Action in Mary

In his *Theology of the Apostolate of the Legion of Mary*, Suenens writes that the German Catholic theologian, Matthias Scheeben, perceived Mary as the original image of the Church, whose soul is the Holy Spirit. Drawing on Scheeben's analogy between Mary as the instrument of the Holy Spirit and the humanity of Christ as the instrument of the *Logos*, Suenens states that

¹¹³ Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, 68.

¹¹⁴ Maura Hearden, "Ambassador for the Word: Mary as a Bridge for Dialogue between Catholicism and Islam," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 18, in Davary, "Mary in Islam," 26.

from the moment of her consent at the Annunciation, Mary resolved herself to being an instrument of the Spirit. He underscores that Mary's cooperation with the Holy Spirit and the joining of these two loves in Jesus Christ is at the center of the Nicene Creed: 'and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.' The Promise of the Legion articulates the bidirectional movement between God's love and human love and the meeting of these two loves in Christ as follows:

The Holy Ghost: the love of God stooping down to us.
Our Lady: human love—the purest in all creation—going up to God.
Jesus Christ: the bond of the union, the meeting-place of a twofold love.¹¹⁵

Suenens explains that Mary understood that the mystery of the Incarnation extended far beyond the momentary outpouring of the Spirit and the birth of Jesus. Perhaps coming to terms with what is to unfold, she did not fear to proclaim in her Magnificat the prophecy: 'All generations shall call me blessed' (Luke 1:48). At the Annunciation then Suenens writes, the Spirit's action in Mary is indissoluble and effected for all time.¹¹⁶ He points out that the significance of Mary's twofold motherhood (bringing forth Christ the Head and the Church, his Body) can only be understood by associating the activity of Mary with that of the Holy Spirit, that is, it one action, that of the Spirit through Mary.¹¹⁷ For this reason, Suenens explains, Mary is called the archetype of the Church after the Spirit, a profound teaching expressed by Pius X in his encyclical *Ad diem illum* (February 2, 1904) and summarized by Pius XII in his encyclical *Mystici corporis* (June 29, 1943).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 10-11.

¹¹⁶ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 11.

¹¹⁷ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 13.

¹¹⁸ Suenens, *Theology of the Apostolate*, 123 n. 7.

As referred to earlier, Congar observes that Christian reflection on the Trinity ascribes a feminine character to the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁹ Like Suenens, Congar too subscribes to the work of Scheeben. In *The Mysteries of Christianity*, Scheeben explicates a link between the Holy Spirit and woman. In his *Dogmatik*, he compares the procession of the Word with the generation of Adam, and the procession of the Holy Spirit with the production of Eve. He insists that man, who is *virtus et sapientia*, and woman, who is *suavitas et caritas*, are like Christ and the Holy Spirit, an interpretation of which is that in the plan of salvation, the relationship between Christ and the Church corresponds to the relationship between Adam-Eve and the Holy Spirit.¹²⁰ Where does Mary fit into this parallel? For this, Congar turns to the work of Maura Böckeler and Willi Moll.

According Böckeler, when the side of Christ hanging on the cross was pierced with a lance, the new Eve, the Church, was born and later commissioned at Pentecost. She says that what the Annunciation was for Christ, the Pentecost was for the Church. The new Eve is the Virgin Mary who symbolizes the Church, that is, the Spirit in human existence. She is the symbol of the response of Love given to God and that response is the Holy Spirit.¹²¹ As virgin, she has three tasks peculiar to her—welcoming or receiving, as spouse or bride, and of union.¹²² Moll explains that the Spirit is God’s maternal function, communicating life. The part the Spirit plays in the upbringing of children is that of a mother who instructs them about God the Father and Jesus by practicing the virtues leading them to the Spirit’s inheritance of grace and truth. The Spirit’s maternal and feminine function unite with the function of the Father and that of the

¹¹⁹ Congar, “Motherhood in God,” 157.

¹²⁰ M. J. Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity* (Eng. tr. St. Louis, London, 1946), pp. 181ff.: Appendix I, following §31; *Dogmatique*, Fr. tr. P. Bélet, II (Paris, 1880), nos 1019ff. (pp. 685ff) and III (Paris, 1881), nos 375 (pp. 241ff.) and 445ff. (pp. 296ff.), in Congar, “Motherhood in God,” 159-160.

¹²¹ Maura Böckeler, *Das grosse Zeichen. Apok 12, 1. Die Frau als Symbol göttlicher Wirklichkeit* (Salzburg, 1941), in Congar, “Motherhood in God,” 160-161.

¹²² Willi Moll, *Die Antwort die Liebe. Gedanken zum christlichen Bild der Frau I* (Graz, 1964); idem, *Vater und Vaterlichkeit* (Graz, 1962), in Congar, “Motherhood in God,” 161.

Son. All these characteristics in their perfection are inherent in the person of Mary, throwing light on the theology of the Holy Spirit and the femininity of God. Moll's position espouses gender essentialism. What Moll claims about mothers is true of fathers as well.

Maximilian Kolbe on the Relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary

Maximilian Kolbe related his Marian theses to the Trinity. Following the tradition of the Church Fathers, he called Mary the 'Spouse of the Holy Spirit.' Though the Third Person of the Trinity did not become incarnate, the expression "Spouse of the Holy Spirit" may lead one to think of the Immaculate Conception (as Mary identifies herself at Lourdes) as the human incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Kolbe writes,

The third Person of the Blessed Trinity never took flesh; still, our human word "spouse" is far too weak to express the reality of the relationship between the Immaculata and the Holy Spirit. We can affirm that she is, in a certain sense, the "incarnation" of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that we love in her; and through her we love the Son. The Holy Spirit is far too little known ... (Conference, Feb. 5, 1941).¹²³

Though Kolbe often reiterated the concept of "spouse," he made clear that the Holy Spirit and Mary remain two separate persons with their individual natures, divine and human respectively. They have two distinct wills but these wills act as one. Henri-Marie Manteau-Bonamy explains that Kolbe's understanding of the title 'Spouse of the Holy Spirit' stresses the intimate union between Mary's will and the unique will of the three divine Persons.¹²⁴ According to Mark Miravalle, Kolbe insisted that it is necessary to go beyond the notion of 'spouse' and compare the Holy Spirit-Mary union with the hypostatic union of Jesus Christ. Kolbe teaches that if the Spirit were to incarnate, it would be in Mary because in human form she is the closest to what a human incarnation of the third Person would be.¹²⁵ Miravalle

¹²³ H. M. Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit: The Marian Teachings of Father Kolbe* (Libertyville: Franciscan Marytown Press, 1977), 50.

¹²⁴ Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, 46.

¹²⁵ Mark Miravalle, "Quasi-Incarnation of the Holy Spirit," *AirMaria*, May 27, 2009, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x9zb40> (accessed July 12, 2019). Miravalle uses "quasi-Incarnation" as

interprets that for Kolbe the Holy Spirit chooses to act through Mary not by disposition but by divine will. Therefore, she is the “quasi-incarnation of the Holy Spirit” to whom the faithful should go in addition to the Spirit.¹²⁶

Kolbe uses two other terms to express Mary’s instrumental relation to the Spirit. He calls her ‘handmaid of the Holy Spirit’ to clarify that the Mary of Lourdes and the Mary of Nazareth are not in opposition, but one who fully understands the poverty of her human spirit. Though she is a woman capable of making her own decisions, she willingly submits herself to become an instrument (a true handmaid) of the Spirit.¹²⁷ In addition, Kolbe calls her the ‘sanctuary of the Holy Spirit’ (language later used by the council in LG §53) not only because her will is conformed to that of the Spirit, but also because “the Holy Spirit dwells in her as in his privileged *sanctuary*.”¹²⁸ For this reason, her body is exempt from sin by the merits of her Son who also brings about her redemption on which she placed all faith.

Kolbe’s articulation of the connection between the Third Person and the Queenship of Mary has received greater recognition in recent years. However, the controversial aspects remain. Though he distinguishes between the Person of the Holy Spirit and the human Mary, he does suggest that if the Holy Spirit were to become incarnate, it would be Mary. He claims that Mary’s action is the action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works only through her, and that together they bring forth the graces that lead to redemption.¹²⁹

Having briefly reviewed the perspectives of Suenens and Congar and the teachings of Kolbe, what follows are three ecclesiastical foundations—Mary as icon of the Spirit and the

opposed to “Incarnation” that Kolbe uses to express the Holy Spirit-Mary union. Mary is the human instrument of the Spirit through whom the graces of redemption flow, making her the Mediatrix of all graces.

¹²⁶ Miravalle, “Quasi-Incarnation of the Holy Spirit.”

¹²⁷ Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, 47-49.

¹²⁸ Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, 51.

¹²⁹ “Thoughts of Francis Turretin: Mary: Quasi-Incarnation of the Holy Spirit?” April 16, 2013, <http://turretinfan.blogspot.com/2013/04/mary-quasi-incarnation-of-holy-spirit.html> (accessed July 13, 2019).

Church, Mary as archetype of the Church, and Mary as first among saints in the Communion of Saints. These foundations are a reminder that Mary is above all else, a disciple of Christ and member of the Pilgrim Church accompanying the faithful in the reign of God.

1.2.4.1 Mary, Icon of the Spirit and the Church

The Spirit is constantly at work in the Church, the source of her life, her growth, her worship, and her salvific activity. Theologians like McNamara, Schmemmann, Congar, and Elbert have articulated the theme of Mary as the icon of the Holy Spirit, summing up the bond between her, the Spirit, and the Church. One cannot speak of the Church, McNamara writes, without speaking of Mary because she is the Church at its source, its model in faith, love, and the perfection of the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Therefore, he writes, “the more fully the Church comes under the dominion of the Spirit, the more closely it is identified with Mary.”¹³⁰

Arguments can also be made that Christ and the Spirit are the source of the Church. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann refers to Mary as “truly the icon and the epiphany of the Church—of the Church as life in Christ and of the Church as Christ’s life in us.”¹³¹ Congar articulates “Mary’s pre-eminent place in the Christian mystery as the model of the Church and of universal intercession. This is the work of the Spirit in her.”¹³² John Elbert writes that the apostolate of Mary is a sharing in the apostolate of her Son when the Spirit gave birth to his Mystical Body from his lanced side on the cross, and commissioned her at Pentecost. Therefore, in her very origins the church bears a Marian character.¹³³

¹³⁰ McNamara, “Holy Spirit and Mary,” 22.

¹³¹ Alexander Schmemmann, “Our Lady and the Holy Spirit,” *Marian Studies* 23, no. 8 (1972), 75. Also see Kroeger, “Holy Spirit and Mary,” 151.

¹³² Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit. Volume I*, 164, in Kroeger, “Holy Spirit and Mary,” 151-152.

¹³³ John A. Elbert, “Mary and the Church,” *Marian Studies* 9, no. 6 (1958): 28.

Mary's vocation in relation to the Church is not distinct from the mission of Christ—in his conception within her, during his Eucharistic life, and ultimately in his suffering and death on the cross. Elbert affirms that her mission is one with her Son's, and receives its efficacy from his Spirit to carry it out with faith and courage. Therefore, Mary, the Mother of the Church, set the infant Church on its path under the impulse of the Spirit. The chapters that follow specifically the case studies on apparitions are examples of Mary uniting her will with that of the Spirit reiterating for souls the tenets of faith, turning her eyes of clemency for nations, and guiding them along the path of repentance and reconciliation.¹³⁴

1.2.4.2 Mary, Archetype of the Church

Mary as icon of the Spirit gives identity to their organic connection in the experience of the Church. Schmemmann affirms that just as the Spirit reveals Mary to the Church, Mary in a unique way reveals the Spirit in the life of the Church.¹³⁵ Therefore, he affirms, their relationship is both *unique* and *archetypal*. It reveals Mary to all humanity as “unique” in her person, in her relationship to Christ and to God, and in her place in the Church as a model of faith, prayer, and community.¹³⁶ It is “archetypal” in the sense that it reveals the nature of the Spirit's relationship with a created being, and the true nature of what sanctification is.¹³⁷ The descent of the Spirit on Mary at the Annunciation symbolizes her personal Pentecost fulfilling her as a human being. This is not to suggest that the Holy Spirit does not fulfill other human beings as persons. In fact, as Schmemmann points out, it is the proper function of the Spirit to fulfill in each person her or his eternal and absolute value. However, in the “personal” Pentecost of Mary there are two

¹³⁴ Elbert, “Mary and the Church,” 27, 29-30.

¹³⁵ Schmemmann, “Our Lady and the Holy Spirit,” 70.

¹³⁶ Bertrand Buby, “Mary, A Model of Ecclesia Orans, in Acts 1:14,” *Marian Studies* 35, no. 12 (1984): 89-90. Buby states that Luke depicts Mary as the *ecclesia-orans*, a woman who believes beyond the death of her Son, uniting in prayer with others who await their empowerment from the Spirit when Jesus is reborn in his Body the Church.

¹³⁷ Schmemmann, “Our Lady and the Holy Spirit,” 72-73.

revelations: the Spirit reveals Mary to herself by fulfilling her with a unique, singular, and eternal vocation; and the Spirit reveals God's presence in each human being as always unique and personal. Her personal Pentecost gives the Church two gifts—the gift of Mary as a person and the gift of the Holy Spirit as the content, the giver and fulfiller of life.¹³⁸

1.2.4.3 Mary in the Communion of Saints

Johnson argues that locating Mary in the communion of saints does justice to her personhood. Symbols like archetype or icon of the Church lead the faithful to lose sight of her identity as a woman of faith. She affirms that the credal statement “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting” situates Mary in the third article of the Apostle's Creed. In doing so, it connects Mary's life with that of other women and men whose lives are marked by the call of the Spirit, and allows female imagery of God to play a guiding role in interpretation. She cautions that the third article of the creed, however, should not be interpreted in isolation from the first article regarding God who created the world out of love, or from the second article about Jesus born of Mary, was crucified, died and rose on the third day for the salvation of the world.¹³⁹

The credal framework Johnson claims, places Mary in a pneumatological paradigm as a woman of the Spirit. Among the community of disciples, Mary is a woman graced by God, responsive to Spirit-Sophia, and constantly in partnership with those who seek the aid of the Spirit in a world of suffering. This language of partnership is key to bettering our understanding of Mary in the communion of saints. On one hand, this symbol humanizes Mary. In *A New Pentecost?* Suenens cautions that Mary should not be isolated in this communion because she like

¹³⁸ Schmemmann, “Our Lady and the Holy Spirit,” 73-74.

¹³⁹ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 101-104.

all the elect and deceased members share in the Body of Christ with one another as well as with the living in a reciprocal interaction proportional to the degree of their vocation and election. At the same time, one cannot but acknowledge Mary's unique maternal role in this communion owing to her bringing forth Jesus' humanity, and continuing to live in "fellowship with the Holy Spirit" in mind and body.¹⁴⁰

In the final analysis, though Mary is the archetype of the Church, she is also a member. Sight of this fact is often lost in the style of language with which the Church speaks of Mary and the honorific titles bestowed on her. Brian Daley reminds us that this rhetoric of praise, enthusiasm, and devotion can minimize her central connection to the gospel message that through her God entered the world and became one of us by taking on her human nature. He also cautions that emphasis on apparitions themselves pose a danger in that the contemporary Catholic Church often focuses on the visions and messages of young seers than on scripture and the teachings of Jesus. He writes that such devotional fervor "can become a new religion, with a new Marian gospel, new moral appeals and warnings, and new charismatic sources of authority. When visionaries serve as a new magisterium for the devout, when Mary becomes, even implicitly, the central focus of a person's religious faith and practice, she distracts from Christianity rather than reinforces it."¹⁴¹

This chapter addressed five aspects of the contemporary discourse on the Holy Spirit and Mary and some of the scriptural, ecumenical, interreligious, and ecclesiastical foundations of the Spirit's action in her. What follows in Chapter 2 is an exposition of the phenomenon of Marian apparitions and manifestations in the Church, reinforcing Daley's cautionary counsel.

¹⁴⁰ Suenens, *New Pentecost?*, 204.

¹⁴¹ Brian E. Daley, "Woman of Many Names: Mary in Orthodox and Catholic Theology," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010), 847, 867.

CHAPTER 2

Marian Apparitions and Manifestations

2.1 Marian Apparitions and Manifestations as Actions of the Holy Spirit

This study underscores the central theme that after her Transitus and Assumption claims of Mary's appearances around the world over the past two millennia are not her initiative, but manifestations of the action of the Holy Spirit. Supernatural apparitions have biblical roots. Scripture is replete with theophanies, angelophanies, christophanies, and even satanophanies.¹ They are manifestations or signs that go to the heart of human events and play their part in the unfolding of history. These manifestations can never contradict faith and must focus on the core of Christ's teachings.² There have been a number of studies on the theology of Marian mysteries, but most of them are concerned with eliciting the gospel events in the life of Mary or with helping understand the universal significance of her role in the economy of salvation. Marian apparitions and manifestations do not fit into this pattern, as they are not part of the deposit of faith as revealed by Scripture or of her sacred privileges as studied by theologians.³ Furthermore, only a few studies have taken Marian apparitions to the next level by focusing on their deeper meaning in unfolding God's divine plan and their significance for ecclesial life. This chapter has two sections. The first section highlights a few insights from the history of Marian apparitions and manifestations followed by an exposition of the complexity of the authentication process. The second section is a review of the common features of Marian apparitions and manifestations and the common themes of their messages.

¹ Salvatore M. Perrella, *Le Mariofonie: per una teologia delle apparizioni* (Padova: Messaggero, 2009), 69-97.

² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Message of Fatima" (26 June 2000) at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-Fatima_en.html.

³ Louis Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady: Their Place in the Life of the Church* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1960), 38.

2.1.1 Insights from the History of Marian Apparitions and Manifestations

A systematic understanding of Marian apparitions and manifestations must begin with history. The proliferation of Marian apparitions since the 19th century has resulted in a resurgence of interest in Mary as manifested by the popular piety of the faithful. However, the history of her appearances dates back to the early Church. This section highlights some of the insights of this phenomenon going back to the Apostolic Age.

Ancient tradition records the first apparition of the Virgin Mary to St. James the Greater in Zaragoza, Spain in 40 A.D. while she was still alive in Jerusalem, a case of bilocation. As he was praying with his disciples one night on the banks of the Ebro, the Virgin seated on a marble pillar appeared to St. James commanding him to build an oratory at that place. The apostle immediately set about building a chapel housed today inside the Basilica of El Pilar. In the chapel, there is a statue of the Virgin standing atop a miraculous pillar of jasper.⁴

According to tradition preserved by the Greeks, after her Transitus, Mary appeared to the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem when they finished performing the last duties to her sacred body before burying her at the foot of Mount Olives in the Kidron Valley. After repast, they were giving thanks when Mary appeared. In their joy, William Walsh writes, they beseeched her help to which she replied, “I shall be with you always.”⁵

There are diverging views concerning the details of what some writers classify as an apparition. John of Patmos, presumed author of Revelation recorded a vision in 12:1 “Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman, adorned with the sun, standing on the moon, and with

⁴ Isabel Allardyce, *Historic Shrines of Spain* (New York: Franciscan Missionary Press, 1912), 6-12. Also see *Legends of the Blessed Virgin*, Jacques Albin S. Collin de Plancy (London: Charles Dolman, 1852), 261-267. Among the many miracles attributed to the Virgin, one of the most noteworthy is that of a man named Michael Pellicer who in 1638 recovered the use of his leg that had been amputated (264-267).

⁵ William J. Walsh, *The Apparitions and Shrines of Heaven's Bright Queen in Legend, Poetry and History from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time*, Vol. One (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd., 1904), 45-46.

twelve stars on her head for a crown.”⁶ Among the ancient writers who gave this text a Marian interpretation are Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 402), Quodvultdeus (d. 454), and Oecumenius (d. ca. 550),⁷ while others like Andrew of Caesarea⁸ drew on Galatians 4:26 to explain the woman symbol as the long-accepted female personification of the People of God, a reference the Church.⁹ The twelve stars symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel (Joseph’s dream in Genesis 37:9), or the twelve apostles who carried the Good News to different parts of the world.

Modern popes have assigned a Marian context. Pius X interprets the “woman” as the Virgin, but the birth of the child later in Revelation 12 as that of the Church of which Mary is the Mother.¹⁰ Pius XII interprets the whole scene as the Assumption.¹¹ Paul VI begins his apostolic exhortation *Signum magnum* interpreting the woman as the Blessed Virgin.¹² Linking the “woman” in Genesis 3:15 present at the beginning of history with the Woman of the Apocalypse (Rev 12:1)

⁶ Note, however, that scholars claim the ahistoricity of John’s visions. Rev 12:1 are visions of a different nature. Though the terms “apparition” and “vision” are used interchangeably in the literature, there is a distinction. In an apparition, the seer is awake, sees *and* hears the Virgin Mary or Christ, and their image is not of a statue or picture in the vicinity (See *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*, Michael P. Carroll (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 130). Unclear images or other supernatural phenomena like weeping statues, the changing color of rosary beads, or the sudden calming of the turbulent sea fall into the category of manifestations. Visions refer only to the appearance of a divine figure with or without a spoken message.

⁷ Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, “Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ” (16 May 2005), §5, at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20050516_mary-grace-hope-christ_en.html#:ftn5. Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 402), *Panarion* 78.11; Quodvultdeus (d. 454), *Sermones de Symbolo* III, I.4-6; Oecumenius (d. ca.550) *Commentarius in Apocalypsin* 6.

⁸ For example, in the Early Middle Ages Andreas of Caesarea (d. 637) in his commentary on the Book of Revelation interpreted the woman in Rev 12 as corresponding to the Church. See *The Fathers of the Church: Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Andrew of Caesarea (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 23-24, 137, 145-146.

⁹ Geoffrey Ashe, *The Virgin: Mary’s Cult and the Re-emergence of the Goddess* (Charleston: The History Press, 2008), 121.

¹⁰ Pius X, Encyclical on the Immaculate Conception *Ad diem illum laetissimum* (2 February 1904), §24, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_02021904_ad-diem-illum-laetissimum.html.

¹¹ Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution Defining the Dogma of the Assumption *Munificentissimus Deus* (1 November 1950), §27, at The Holy See, https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html.

¹² Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Signum magnum* (13 May 1967), Introduction, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19670513_signum-magnum.html.

at the end of times, John Paul II refers to her as the Holy Mother of the Redeemer.¹³ However, some contemporary biblical scholars dispute that the “woman” is the Virgin Mary.¹⁴

There are logical claims based on the metaphorical text in Revelation 12:2-6 that if the male child destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod is Jesus, then the woman to whom he is born must be Mary. John of Patmos appears to bypass Jesus’ earthly life. After his birth, Christ “caught up to God” and is sitting on his throne plausibly pointing to his Ascension. However, to discern the apocalyptic woman as the Virgin is to find a basis for her worship. A number of scholars suggest that ‘Virgin Mary’ is simply a new name for a single goddess worshipped through history under different names; adding ‘Virgin Mary’ to the list does not alter the hypothesis that all these goddesses are in some sense the same goddess.¹⁵

In the first millennium, Marian apparitions brought a number of shrines into existence becoming the focal point for devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Historical records claim that Mary appeared to religious persons who later were proclaimed saints by the church as well as to the laity. Among the famous recorded cases are her apparitions to Gregory the Wonder-Worker (ca. 238) in Asia as documented in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394), Ildephonsus of Toledo

¹³ John Paul II, Encyclical on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church *Redemptoris mater* (25 March 1987), §24, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html.

¹⁴ See Adela Y. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1976), 71-75. The cosmic adornment in Revelation 12:1, according to Collins, is the ultimate exaltation and fitting for the Queen of Heaven. The image portrayed “is that of a high-goddess, a cosmic queen conceived in astral categories: the moon is a mere footstool for her; the circle of heaven, the zodiac, her crown; the mighty sun, her garment.” Collins claims that the woman could possibly refer to one of the goddesses of Hellenistic and early Roman periods: the Ephesian Artemis, the Syrian Atargatis, and the Egyptian Isis, all of who were accorded cosmic honors such as *regina caeli*, or apocalyptic titles like “mistress of fate.” She concludes that any one of these three goddesses might have served as the model for the description of the woman in 12:1 because of their explicit depictions as a high goddess and close associations with the sun, moon, or the zodiac. See also, *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (London: Burns & Oates, 2008), 7-18.

¹⁵ Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 32. The woman is called ‘Mother of the Gods’ by the Phrygians, Minerva by the Athenians, Venus by the Cyprians, Diana by the Cretans, Proserpine by the Sicilians, Ceres by the Eleusians, and Isis by the Egyptians.

(Spain, d. ca. 667), and Egwin of Worcester (England, d. ca. 717).¹⁶ In the Middle Ages, it became customary for Mary to ask her visionary to fulfill a request. The Holy House of Walsingham was built on Mary's request to construct a chapel or shrine during an apparition to Richeldis de Faverches, the Lady of the Manor in Walsingham, England in 1061.¹⁷ In a myriad of apparition claims from 1173 to 1779, Mary appeared to founders of religious orders like Francis of Assisi (Franciscans), Dominic (Dominicans), and Ignatius of Loyola (Jesuits)¹⁸ and saints like Bernard of Clairvaux, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Margaret Mary Alacoque, Gertrude the Great, and Alphonsus Liguori.¹⁹

Before transitioning to the modern period, two events in the Catholic Church noteworthy for their impact on Marian apparitions are the Great Schism of 1054 and the Protestant Reformation of 1517. Though the former split the Church into the Latin and Eastern Orthodox, there was no impact on Marian apparitions in both churches where devotion to Mary thrived. The Reformation on the other hand had a paralyzing effect on apparition history and Marian devotion. Visionaries were unlikely to report apparitions to ecclesiastical authorities because Protestants and Catholic clerical hierarchy were hostile in their reception of these events. The Reformers were opposed to pilgrimages undertaken for penitential reasons or as fulfillment of a vow. Iconoclasts dismissed apparitions and the Marian cult as diabolic, attacked shrines, and forbade the veneration of relics and saints.²⁰ Though the Council of Trent (1545-1563) sanctioned the veneration of images, indulgences, and pilgrimages, apparitions while still occurring were not reported until after the end of the Roman Inquisition in 1829.

¹⁶ Walsh, *Apparitions and Shrines of Heaven's Bright Queen* Vol. One, 103-107, 193, 209.

¹⁷ Walsh, *Apparitions and Shrines of Heaven's Bright Queen* Vol. One, 329-338.

¹⁸ Walsh, *Apparitions and Shrines of Heaven's Bright Queen*, Vol. One, 353, Vol. Two, 31-34, 353-370.

¹⁹ Walsh, *Apparitions and Shrines of Heaven's Bright Queen*, Vol. One, 287-295, Vol. Two, 127-144, 181-186, 189-206, Vol. Three, 27-33, 209-231, 251.

²⁰ Thomas A. Thompson, "Pilgrimages and Shrines: A Recognition Long Delayed," *Marian Studies* 51, no. 9 (2000): 115.

A tabulation of accredited apparitions from the 16th to the 20th centuries would place Europe as Mary's favored destination, a majority of them reported only after 1829. Despite the aforementioned suppression, three major apparitions were reported on other continents at the time insulated from the Reformation—Guadalupe, Mexico (1531); Vailankanni, India (16th/17th centuries); and LaVang, Vietnam (1798). These apparition sites attracted pilgrims in huge numbers, and developed a reputation for miraculous healings and affinity for the poor. After 1829, the first of many modern apparitions was at Rue du Bac, Paris (1830) where Catherine Labouré reported a vision of Mary known today as Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Following Rue du Bac, three other major apparitions were reported in France—La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1848), and Pontmain (1871), and one at Pellevoisin (1876). After France, Philippsdorf, Bohemia (1866), Knock, Ireland (1879), Marpingen, Germany (1873), Fátima, Portugal (1917), and Beauraing-Banneux, Belgium (1932-1933) reported Marian apparitions.²¹

A key difference between apparitions of the first fifteen centuries of church history and those of the last five is that in the former, the messages were not concerned with right doctrine and therefore, Marian apparitions were not controversial. Instead, Mary offered consolation, encouragement, and exhortations to holiness. At the turn of the first millennium, apocalyptic prophecies came from individuals claiming inspiration by the Spirit.²² At the end of the second millennium on the other hand, apocalyptic prophecies have taken on a transcultural dimension closely linked with Marian apparitions. Another difference characteristic of apparitions in the last five centuries is that Mary's appearances were not restricted to the Catholic context. She has appeared to Jews, Hindus, Muslims, as well as in countries without a religious identity.

²¹ Michael O'Carroll, "Apparitions of Our Lady," in McLoughlin and Pinnock, *Mary is for Everyone*, 286-290. These are only a few key apparitions of the many that O'Carroll lists.

²² Roy A. Varghese, *God-Sent: A History of the Accredited Apparitions of Mary* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 35.

2.1.2 The Complexity of the Phenomenon

The many actors involved in the accurate chronicling and authentication of Marian apparitions make it a complex phenomenon. Ingo Swann writes that a vision attributed to the Virgin may involve thousands or even millions of people classified into seven sets of actors that contribute to the social dramatics, confusion, and pandemonium. The first group are the *seers* or *visionaries* of the Virgin, typically few in number and mostly children, adolescents or young adults not yet fully educated. The second are the *witnesses* who corroborate what the seers are saying, claiming that they also see Our Lady or some cosmic phenomena surrounding the event. As the events unfold and reports of these visions spread, *devout pilgrims* as well as the curious flock to the site(s) of apparitions. The first charged with ascertaining the facts and making decisions about the authenticity of apparitions are the *ecclesiastics*; they are also the first who work to discredit them or ignore them completely. At times, it seems like *civil authorities* show more interest and at first feel compelled to interrogate the seers. With most apparitions occurring in remote places, however, these authorities soon become preoccupied with matters concerning crowd control, traffic management, and sanitation as pilgrims descend upon their quiet hamlets. In the modern period, apparitions and manifestations have attracted significant *media* interest as well as *skeptics* who use all possible means to debunk the evidence.²³

2.1.2.1 Discernment and Judgments Concerning Authenticity of Apparitions and Miracles

Throughout Christian history, there have been claims and acceptance or rejection of Marian apparitions and miracles after rigorous ecclesiastical inquiry that have included philosophical, scientific, and theological criteria. According to Mark Garvey, the Church identifies three ways in which visions and locutions manifest themselves—corporeal,

²³ Swann, *Great Apparitions of Mary*, 11-12.

imaginative, and intellectual.²⁴ Due to the complexity of discerning authenticity, the Church invests significant resources in the investigation process. She honors the insights of saints and seers, many of who have received messages through private revelations. The Church upholds Christian doctrine that revelation given in the person, acts, and words of Jesus Christ is complete with the death of the last apostle and that the messages of private apparitions or visions add nothing to the deposit of faith.²⁵

2.1.2.2 Position of the Catholic Church: A Balance between Rational Empiricism and Credulity

Louis Lochet states that the Church maintains a balance between rational empiricism that would *a priori* reject the miraculous and a credulity that accepts anything extraordinary as being miraculous.²⁶ The Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) reserved to The Holy See the approval of new prophecies and revelations. About three decades later, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) authorized local bishops to investigate and approve supernatural phenomena like apparitions before authorizing public worship. This means that Vatican approval was not required for an apparition to be considered authentic. Following the Church's position, Garvey affirms that "private" revelations, even those approved for belief by the faithful, cannot take precedence over the accepted canon of public revelation. Any indication that a vision contradicts or alters any fact of Christian history and salvation or opposes official Christian doctrine would be a sign of the visionary's falsehood.²⁷

²⁴ Mark Garvey, *Searching for Mary: An Exploration of Marian Apparitions across the U.S.* (New York: Plume, 1998), 64-67. In corporeal visions, the visionary actually sees the object, and may attribute this to a higher power conveying an image directly to the seer's sense of sight. As the name suggests, the imagination triggers imaginative visions without involving the sense of sight. The third classification, intellectual visions, produce neither visual impressions nor imaginative pictures. They fill the mind with new knowledge of some truth or mystery without the influence of images, symbols, or the faculty of reason.

²⁵ See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), §66-67.

²⁶ Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady*, 41.

²⁷ Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 68.

Though apparitions had long been a part of the devotional life in Western Christianity, the official position of the Church for Roman Catholics remained unclear until Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini, the future Benedict XIV (p. 1740-1758), addressed the matter in his treatise *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione*.²⁸ He drew up stringent rules for discernment of private revelations and the miracles needed for the canonization of saints affirming that such events must be truly extraordinary, beyond human reason, and beyond the scope of natural causes. The Church does not make faith in approved apparitions or their messages mandatory or incumbent upon the Catholic faithful to conduct their lives according to the directives set forth by the approved messages. Belief in apparitions is not a necessary component of salvation.²⁹ Taking supernatural phenomena seriously does not suggest an alternate to the ordinary means of salvation found in the Eucharist and the sacraments; rather, these events direct believers to the ordinary means.³⁰ Benedict XIV clarified the laity's obligations with respect to private revelations as follows:

The assent of Catholic faith ought not and indeed cannot be accorded to these revelations even when they have been thus approved. The assent of human faith is owed to them in keeping with the norms of prudence when these indicate that such revelations are probable and religiously credible.³¹

The Church's infallible authority is not at play in matters of apparitions; she does not define authenticity of such events as articles of faith. Apparitions and miracles do not form part of the deposit of revelation though the "Church is committed by her judgment and her attitude and inspires the confidence of the faithful by her actions, her prayer and her liturgy."³² Benedict XIV

²⁸ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 9.

²⁹ Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 68-69.

³⁰ Ralph McInerny, *Miracles: A Catholic View* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1986), 153.

³¹ Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 69. Benedict XIV distinguished between Catholic faith (*fides catholica*) and human faith (*fides humana*), the former reserved for elements of public revelation such as faith in the Gospels, in the mystery of the Incarnation, the doctrine of the Trinity, Marian dogmas, etc. while the latter is the kind of faith one would place in the word of another human being.

³² Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady*, 33-34. The attitude of the Church is one of prudence. She neither refuses the supernatural nor despises the miraculous, and exercises wisdom to suspend judgment when the reality of God's action is not apparent. Lochet affirms, "The moment she recognizes the footsteps of Our Lord she commits herself with a total movement of the heart in adoration" and such should be the attitude of Christians (34).

affirmed that a Catholic may refuse assent to private revelation without causing injury to Catholic faith as long as she or he does so “modestly, not without reason, and without contempt.”³³ However, the pope also asserted that Catholics must not reject the *possibility* of private revelation because an attitude of fundamental disbelief in supernatural revelation would constitute “a flawed understanding of Christian faith, which, after all, is itself a supernatural, revealed religion.”^{34 35} At the same time, there is the misconception that because Christianity as a revealed religion is steeped in mystery and the supernatural the Church “is eager to seize any chance to proclaim the irruption of the supernatural into the world, that, on every possible occasion, her priests run about, crying ‘miracle, miracle.’ In reality, the Church looks with a very cold and skeptical eye on claims that a miracle has been performed.”³⁶ The Church’s skepticism is evident in the rigor with which claims of apparitions and miracles are investigated.

2.1.2.3 Ascertaining Authenticity

Lochet writes that it is not paradoxical to say that the Church is skeptical of apparitions; the Church in this context means both the teaching authority of the hierarchy and the spontaneous reactions of the more learned Christians and priests.³⁷ The Church accepts the authenticity of supernatural intervention only with great circumspection, investing significant

³³ Benedict XIV, *Heroic Virtue: A Portion of the Treatise of Benedict XIV on the Beatification and Canonization of the Servants of God*, Volume 3 (London: Thomas Richardson & Son, 1852), 397.

³⁴ Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 69.

³⁵ McInerney, *Miracles*, 121-22. Chapter III (On Faith) of the Vatican I dogmatic constitution (*Dei Filius*) states that God provides external signs as arguments on behalf of revelation stressing three things about miracles: (1) biblical accounts of them are not to be dismissed; (2) they can be known with certainty; and (3) they are proof of the divine origin of Christianity. In his *motu proprio*, *Sacrorum antistitum*, dated September 1, 1910, Pius X reiterates that miracles prove the divine origin of Christianity and should not be dismissed as fitting only to earlier times, and to minds less advanced than contemporary intellect.

³⁶ John Beevers, *The Sun Her Mantle* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1953), 41-42, in “Changing Devotional Paradigms and Their Impact upon Nineteenth-Century Marian Apparitions: The Case of La Salette,” Emma Anderson, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 52, no. 3-4 (1998): 90.

³⁷ Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady*, 30.

time, energy, and resources in applying stringent criteria in the evaluation of these events, and insists on waiting before passing judgment.

In 1978, the CDF issued *Normae Congregationis* to systematize three essential criteria for assessing and approving the authenticity of an apparition: the facts of the case, the doctrine that emerges, and the spiritual and other fruits. *Normae Congregationis* replaced the guidelines of Lateran V (1516). This document outlines the positive and negative criteria for evaluating each presumed apparition or revelation, the conditions for intervention by competent ecclesiastical authority, the authorities deemed competent to intervene, and the responsibilities of the Congregation when intervention is requested.³⁸

The positive criteria include the high probability and moral certitude of the fact (apparition) through thorough investigation that looks at particular circumstances such as the personal qualities of the subjects—their psychological state, honesty, moral life, sincerity, and obedience towards ecclesiastical authority. The investigation also examines the conformity of the message with Christian doctrine and the spiritual fruits borne over time with respect to prayer, conversions, testimonies of charity, and the like. Negative criteria include doctrinal errors attributed to God, the Virgin Mary, or a saint with evidence that the subject unconsciously added to the fact. Consciously adding to the fact for profit or gain, grave immoral acts committed in connection with the fact or otherwise, or psychological disorder of the subject are grounds for a negative decision.³⁹

Of the myriad of Marian apparitions around the world, only a few have received approval by The Holy See. Falling into this category are: Guadalupe (Mexico, 1531), Lezajsk (Poland,

³⁸ Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, “Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions and Revelations” (25 February 1978) at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html.

³⁹ CDF, “Norms Regarding Discernment.”

1578), Siluva (Lithuania, 1608-1612), Laus (France, 1664-1718), Rue du Bac—Paris (France, 1830), Rome (Italy, 1842), La Salette (France, 1846), Lourdes (France, 1858), Filippsdorf (Czech Republic, 1866), Pontmain (France, 1871), Gietrzwałd (Poland, 1877), Knock (Ireland, 1879), Fátima (Portugal, 1917), Beauraing (Belgium, 1932-33), Banneux (Belgium, 1933), and Kibeho (Rwanda, 1981-89).⁴⁰

Among the apparitions that have been discerned as authentic at the episcopal level are: Quito (Ecuador, 1594-1634), Querrien, Bretania (France, 1652), Montagnaga (Italy, 1729-1730), Robinsonville (now Champion), Wisconsin (United States, 1859), Castelpetroso (Italy, 1888-1890), Amsterdam (Netherlands, 1945-1959), Akita (Japan, 1973-1981), Betania (Venezuela, 1976-1990), Cuapa (Nicaragua, 1980), and San Nicolas (Argentina, 1983-present).⁴¹

After episcopal approval, The Holy See may officially release a statement or grant symbolic gestures such as a papal visit, crowning of the associated icon,⁴² establishment of a feast day, construction of a basilica, or canonization of the particular visionary. Earlier, the Code of Canon law of 1917 (1399, #5) prohibited any publication about new apparitions, revelations, visions, prophecies, and miracles without the approbation of the local ordinary. Following the statement of Vatican II on the right of mass media to information, Paul VI lifted the requirement that all writings about apparitions needed ecclesiastical approval before publication. Approval

⁴⁰ The Miracle Hunter, http://miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/vatican.html (accessed July 14, 2018). Vatican recognition implies investigation and approval by the local bishop.

⁴¹ Perrella, *Le Mariofonie*, 132, based on *Normae Congregationis* (1978). Though negative judgments (*non constat de supernaturalitate*) and rulings with no evidence of supernaturality (*constat de non supernaturalitate*) on a few rare occasions have been changed to positive judgments with the ruling of a subsequent bishop, positive judgments have never been reversed by a subsequent bishop in the history of the Church. See also, Miracle Hunter, http://miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/bishop.html (accessed July 14, 2018). An exception is the case of Lipa, Philippines: initially declared not supernatural (1951), ban lifted (1992), then declared supernatural and worthy of belief by Archbishop Ramón Argüelles (2015). The archbishop's declaration was nullified by the CDF in 2016. See The Miracle Hunter, http://miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/unapproved_apparitions/lipa/index.html (accessed May 6, 2019).

⁴² Ragnhild B. Finnestad, "Apparitions, Icons, and Photos: A Study of Modern Coptic Visions of the Holy World," *Temenos* 30 (1994): 4. The term *icon* refers to "any image of holy power used in religious devotion of any kind." In this study, it refers to a two-dimensional image such as a portrait or scene, or a statue of the Virgin Mary.

of a Marian apparition by the local bishop implies that its message is not contrary to Christian faith and morals, and that devotion to Mary may proceed in a special way at that particular site.⁴³ Central to the Church's position on apparitions is that even when she "approves" particular private revelations as has been done in the case of the aforementioned apparitions, the approval extends only so far as to say that the particular revelation is "worthy of belief" (*constat de supernaturalitate*⁴⁴). It does not add to or decrement the deposit of faith that is complete in Jesus Christ and with the death of the last apostle.

In most instances, apparitions only serve to underscore what the gospels already instruct in terms of the need for penance, prayer, reconciliation, and conversion. A preoccupation with modernity has led humanity to fall prey to relativism, personalism, indifferentism, and other evils that ignore the gospel message. Where there appears to be a persistent crisis of faith, there are claims of Marian apparitions with messages to stop offending God. Ralph McNerny writes that one word summarizes Mary's messages: *Repent!* This word makes clear her love for humanity, and guided by the Holy Spirit, the role she is to play in ecclesial life. Her apparitions are not about inciting curiosity about sign and wonder, but about heeding her salutary warnings⁴⁵ as in the case of La Salette, Fátima, Kibeho, and others.

2.2 Common Characteristics and Common Themes of Apparitions and Manifestations

In general, Marian apparitions display common characteristics. Their messages carry similar themes even though their contexts are diverse. This section is a discussion of the salient common features and common themes analyzed in the context of three well-established Marian apparitions of the modern period selected based on the persistence of a cult while tangentially

⁴³ IMRI, "Apparitions Yesterday and Today."

⁴⁴ Perrella, *Le Mariofonie*, 132.

⁴⁵ McNerny, *Miracles*, 109.

drawing on considerations related to other apparitions. The three apparitions are La Salette (1846) and Lourdes (1858) in France, and Fátima (1917) in Portugal. These three apparitions fall within the hundred-year period referred to by a number of writers as the “Marian Age” that includes another well-established apparition at Rue du Bac, Paris, in 1830, as well as the less celebrated ones—Rome (1842), Pontmain (1871), Pellevoisin (1876), Knock (1879), Beauraing (1932), and Banneux (1933). With scholarship offered by David Blackbourn, Michael Carroll, Janice Connell, John Delaney, René Laurentin, Louis Lochet, Ann Matter, Chris Maunder, Thomas Thompson, Sandra Zimdars-Swartz and others, this presentation does not suggest that these common characteristics and themes are limited only to these three cases, or that every apparition includes all of these features. In some instances, a characteristic may have occurred, but was not documented either because it was considered unimportant or private.⁴⁶ This is not a rubric for authenticating future apparitions though one might observe how in some instances, an earlier apparition becomes the model for understanding later events. Furthermore, this is not an attempt to evaluate every single action of Mary, or to trace the development of the theological implications of those actions. This section attempts to answer three questions:

1. Where is Mary appearing?
2. To whom is she appearing and what is her appearance like?
3. What is she saying during her apparitions?

These questions address the implicit interplay between socioeconomic and political factors, religious attitudes, cultural norms, and the impact they have on interpreting apparitions, where and to whom they occur, perhaps why Mary says what she says in her reported meetings with humanity, and how her messages are interpreted. All told, these attributes and messages contribute to the overall unity of apparitions, and the impact they have on ecclesial life in terms

⁴⁶ Sara Horsfall, “The Experience of Marian Apparitions and the Mary Cult,” *The Social Science Journal* 37, no. 3 (2000): 379.

of sacralizing landscapes, changing devotional paradigms in the modern age, and other considerations of significance to the local church, addressed in Chapter 6.

2.2.1 Common Characteristics

2.2.1.1 *Geography of Location and the Prevailing Atmosphere*

Many of the places associated with Marian apparitions are in the remote countryside, relatively inaccessible even with modern means of transportation. John Delaney writes that Mary did not appear in the beautiful gardens of Versailles or the lush vineyards of France, the rich wheat-growing areas of Midwest United States, the castles of the rich, or the universities of the learned.⁴⁷ Rather, in France she appeared to Bernadette Soubirous at the foothills of the Pyrenees, to Maximin Giraud and Mélanie Mathieu Calvat in the parish of La Salette high up in the Alps. In Portugal, she made six appearances to Lúcia dos Santos, and her cousins, Jacinta and Francisco Marto, in the quiet hamlets of Fátima and Aljustrel. These were once barren areas where even after intense cultivation the land produced little for people to earn a livelihood.

Not only are some of these places inaccessible, they are also located in areas that at the time lacked Christian evangelization, or where the forces of the Enlightenment prevailed. Janice Connell writes that in these places political aggrandizement, greed, avarice, and a host of other negative impulses crushed life's simplicity. "The graciousness of mutual respect, service, and abiding love were slowly crumbling into indifference, self-indulgence, and indolence."⁴⁸

In Portugal, a republic replaced the monarchy in 1910. Freedom meant no God and no king. The regime soon demonstrated antireligious bias; the Minister of Justice, Afonso Costa, assured the "politically enlightened" that within two decades religion would disappear from

⁴⁷ John J. Delaney, "Our Lady's Apparitions," in *A Woman Clothed with the Sun: Eight Great Appearances of Our Lady in Modern Times*, ed. John J. Delaney (New York: Image Books, 2001), 9-10.

⁴⁸ Janice T. Connell, *Meetings with Mary: Visions of the Blessed Mother* (New York: Random House Publishing Co., 1996), 71.

Portugal, closing monasteries and convents. In 1933, when state control was handed over to Antonio Oliveira Salazar, he was dangerously hailed by some clerics as “the messiah” that the Virgin Mary had allegedly promised would come to rescue Portugal. Embracing the Fátima cult, Salazar rallied the faithful to defend the apparition story from left-wing political dissent, making Fátima “one of the ideological pillars of the antimodern, antiliberal, and antidemocratic Portuguese ‘New State’ (1933-74).”⁴⁹ Jeffrey Bennett’s focus is on the social dynamics of the Fátima apparitions and their impact on the seers, not the political dimension. Salazar’s support of the apparitions became a political tool to legitimize his government. His insistence that Portugal’s Catholic identity infuse the 1933 constitution and his Marian devotion did not translate into a prominent role for the Church during his regime. He placed limits on the Church’s influence and even punished clerics who criticized his human rights record. Fátima became his secret weapon to justify aggression towards the Marxists. With the advent of the Cold War, a communist threat against Portugal loomed large. Paul Manuel writes that as Stalin’s communist ideology spread, the Fátima cult intensified after 1947 with the faithful hearkening the Virgin’s messages, praying for Russia and for peace in the world. After Salazar and the ensuing period of political turmoil, the democratic 1976 constitution ushered in an era of peace that witnessed improved church-state relations in Portugal.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Jeffrey S. Bennett, *When the Sun Danced: Myth, Miracles, and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Portugal* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 3-4, 21-22. Catholic investigators, Chanoine C. Barthas and Pere G. Da Fonseca attribute Salazar’s coming to power to the apparitions. They call his rise to power as Portugal’s “double religious and national miracle” of Our Lady of Fátima. This argument according to Bennett, does not contribute to a fuller understanding of the social change dynamics associated with the apparitions. For that, one must shift focus from the deity who made the apparitions possible to the experience of the seers and the interpretation of those events (a shift from theology to anthropology) for answers to questions about how the children’s commands were heeded, by whom, under what conditions, and to what ends, must be pursued. The issue is how the apparitions at Fátima mobilized the *sensus fidelium*, and worked through it to alter the course of history.

⁵⁰ Paul C. Manuel, “The Marian Apparitions in Fátima as Political Reality: Religion and Politics in Twentieth-Century Portugal,” Harvard University Center for European Studies, Working Paper No. 88, n.d., 11-14.

With rationalism on the ascendency, Delaney points out that skepticism, disbelief, ridicule, and blasphemy characterized the atmosphere of the places and times in which Our Lady appeared. Scientific method, innovation, and material progress became the only goals worth seeking, leading to a sort of “barrenness” of mind. Interestingly, all this occurred in Catholic countries. In the modern age, government control by non-believers in these once-staunchly Catholic countries led to a secularization of society and a lukewarm disposition toward faith. No one can know for sure why the Virgin Mary appeared in these rural areas when it appears that religion and faith are more in decadence in urban and suburban areas. The local dwellers near these centers of pilgrimage appear more steadfast in faith than urbanites. One can only conjecture, as Delaney does, that it is not the areas fertile in the world’s goods and knowledge that produce deepest faith in God, but rather, it is the places of dire hardship that emphasize to humanity that the soul does not need worldly things for spiritual fulfillment.⁵¹

2.2.1.2 *Visionaries and Their Social Location*

With few exceptions, in a majority of the celebrated or obscure apparitions of the 19th to early 20th century, the principal seers were children, adolescents, and women who were poor and vulnerable. There is ample evidence, strongly emphasized in devotional accounts, to suggest that these visionaries were from the predominantly rural, impoverished peasantry. This is certainly true in the case of La Salette, Lourdes, and Fátima.

Fourteen-year old Mélanie of La Salette was the daughter of a pit-sawyer and mason. Before leaving home at the age of eight to work as a cowherd on the farms around Corps she was forced to beg for food. Eleven-year old Maximin, her fellow seer and cowherd, was a carter’s

⁵¹ Delaney, “Our Lady’s Apparitions,” 10.

son.⁵² Bernadette of Lourdes was a sickly and asthmatic child, the eldest of six children born to a poor miller and his wife. Frequent illness kept her away from school a result of which she could barely read and write.⁵³ At Fátima, Lúcia, Jacinta, and Francisco were herding sheep at the Cova da Iria near their homes in Aljustrel at the time of the apparitions. Lúcia was the seventh child of a drunken smallholder who lost some of his land.⁵⁴ She received catechesis from her mother. Her natural talents made up for her lack of literary education as became evident in her later manuscripts concerning the apparitions and secret messages.⁵⁵ Her cousins and companion seers, Jacinta and Francisco, would accompany her and tend sheep in the Cova. Despite the simplicity of their Christian initiation, their parents gave them a living example of committed faith: Sunday Mass, family prayer, charity towards the poor despite their own limited means, and truth and respect for all.⁵⁶

From these accounts, one finds that the hillside, agricultural, and 'herder' visionary was a familiar motif of modern apparitions. A number of child visionaries were cowherds and shepherds, farm jobs regarded as lowly and practiced outside the community.⁵⁷

2.2.1.3 Physical Appearance of the Virgin Mary

The physical appearance of Mary offers clues to interpreting the overall message of the apparition. The children of La Salette claimed that the beautiful,⁵⁸ but sad Lady wore a dress of

⁵² David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 7.

⁵³ René Laurentin, *Lourdes*, i. 75 ff., 131-35; Jean Hellé, *Miracles* (London, 1953), 48-57; Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 158-159, in Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 7.

⁵⁴ Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 327.

⁵⁵ Lúcia dos Santos, *Lúcia Speaks: Memoirs and Letters of the Last-Surviving Seer of Fátima*, trans. Dominican Nuns of the Perpetual Rosary, Fátima, Portugal (Washington: AMI Press, 1976), 12.

⁵⁶ Sanctuary of Fátima, <https://www.fatima.pt/en/pages/life-and-spirituality> (accessed July 18, 2018).

⁵⁷ W. Danckert, *Unehrlische Leute. Die verfemten Berufe* (Berne, 1963); K.S. Kramer, 'Ehrliche/unehrliche Gewerbe,' in *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1971), 855-858, in Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 8.

⁵⁸ In many apparitions, Mary is described as beautiful. Beauty is a European construct that is important to reveal God and human experience of God. The beauty about Christ and Mary is in revelation.

white radiance studded with pearls, and a gold-colored apron. She wore a high cap bent slightly forward in front with a wreath of roses around. Her slippers had roses on their tips. She wore a strange necklace that had a crucifix with a hammer on one side and pincers on the other.⁵⁹ At Massabielle, Mary reportedly appeared to Bernadette dressed in a simple white gown with a blue sash at the waist and a long, flowing white veil. She wore no shoes, but the golden roses on her feet seem to match the golden chain of her white rosary. When pressed by the local pastor to inquire into the identity of the Lady, Bernadette returned with these words: “I come from heaven. I am the Immaculate Conception.”⁶⁰

In the first apparition of the Virgin on May 13, 1917, in Fátima, Lúcia and her cousin, Jacinta, claimed they saw a beautiful Lady “more brilliant than the sun”⁶¹ hovering over an holm oak tree in the Cova. At this time, Francisco could only see the Lady in the light, but could not hear her. Lúcia was the only one in conversation with the Virgin. In the second apparition on June 13, the Lady appeared as “the woman clothed with the sun.” In the third apparition on July 13, Lúcia describes the Lady in her memoirs as being “all light, crystal clear, dazzling light, gleaming most brilliantly, like a crystal of great beauty through which the sun’s rays glisten.” During the fourth apparition on August 13, a similar cloud hovered over the same oak tree in front of a crowd of 15,000 people. A mystical light followed sounds of explosion and an earthquake-like trembling. People’s faces, their clothes, and the ground reflected the colors of the rainbow. The children, however, were not present. They were imprisoned by local officials who threatened to burn them in oil, but they remained steadfast and resilient in their decision not to reveal what the Lady had entrusted them. After their release, Our Lady appeared to the

⁵⁹ Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 72.

⁶⁰ Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 79.

⁶¹ Luminescence conflated with beauty used to describe Mary’s appearance is a human experience of divine presence.

three children in the area of Valinhos a few days later that month. She next visited them on September 13. On October 13, 1917, the seventh and final apparition known as the “Miracle of the Sun” occurred. The October edition of *O Seculo*, a Lisbon newspaper, reported the final apparition, recounted later in this section.⁶²

2.2.1.4 *Secrets and Prophecy*

The two cowherds of La Salette, Mélanie and Maximin, claimed that the Virgin gave them secrets that they refused to divulge for five years.⁶³ Conjecture about dreadful prophecies that were to befall France attributed to the apparition at La Salette led to the notion of divine wrath. After intervention by bishops and cardinals, the children were coaxed into writing down the secrets separately for Pius IX. Maximin’s letter reflected the simplicity and candor of a child,⁶⁴ but Mélanie’s letter included the following statement: “There are scourges that menace France, but Germany, Italy, all Europe is culpable and merits chastisement. I have far less fear from open impiety than from indifference and human disrespect.”⁶⁵

Four years after the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, Bernadette who had not yet been taught the catechism, who demonstrated no outward expression of piety, and whose family was not respectable, experienced eighteen apparitions of the Virgin in a span of little over six weeks beginning February 11, 1858. According

⁶² Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 89-118. Vivid descriptions of the Virgin during her apparitions taken from *Fátima in Lúcia’s Own Words*, Lúcia dos Santos, ed. Louis Kondor, trans. Dominican Nuns of Perpetual Rosary (Fátima, Portugal: Secretariado dos Pastorinhos, 1998), 89-118.

⁶³ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 166-69, in Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 74. Max Hidec, in his 1969 study of the secrets of La Salette, summarizes the events leading to the transmission of secrets to Pius IX in 1851, the issues associated with the alleged secret of Maximin in 1871, and that of Mélanie in 1879. Hidec speculates that the children initially refused to disclose their secrets for fear of betraying Our Lady. Their fear was not without basis as investigators and pilgrims tried to get the children to confess, but were outsmarted and outmaneuvered. Maximin rejected the suggestion that he was obligated to divulge his secret to the pope since the latter was God’s vicar on earth. Threats of imprisonment and death, bribes and other benefits, tricks and other ruses, no strategy worked. The children’s tenacity impressed the interrogators.

⁶⁴ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 177-78, in Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 74.

⁶⁵ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 178, in Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 74.

to Bernadette, Mary imparted three secrets when she visited her at the grotto. The three secrets have never been revealed.⁶⁶

At Fátima in 1917, Mary imparted three secrets to the three shepherd children, the first during the second apparition and the other two during the third. In her memoirs, Lúcia recorded that Mary promised salvation to those who embrace her Immaculate Heart. During the second apparition, the children saw a vision of hell where unrepentant sinners go. To save them, it is believed that Our Lady instructed the children that God wishes to establish a worldwide devotion to her Immaculate Heart, and if this is done, many souls would be saved and there would be peace in the world. World War I would end, but unless people turned to God, an even worse war would break out. She spoke of an “unknown light” that would appear in the skies as a sign that God is about to allow humanity to choose punishment for its crimes of war, hunger, persecution of the Church and of the Holy Father. To prevent this she asked for the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart and a Communion of Reparation on the first Saturday of each month. If her appeal was carried out, Russia would be converted. Otherwise, that nation would continue to spread its errors throughout the world by abandoning the faith and embracing Communist totalitarianism, leading to wars and persecution of the Church.⁶⁷

Zimdars-Swartz writes that earlier apparitions reveal much about the function of secrets for both the seers and the public, and how secrets became a locus of power and carriers of apocalyptic expectations.⁶⁸ While interest and controversies continued to grow around secrets, they also became an inducement to watchfulness, prayer, and obedience to the will of God.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 77.

⁶⁷ Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 77-78.

⁶⁸ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 167.

⁶⁹ Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 76-77.

2.2.1.5 Accompanying Supernatural Phenomena and Miracles

Unlike the La Salette apparition that was single and private, Lourdes and Fátima were serial and public. As news began to spread about the initial mystical appearances of who was presumed to be the Blessed Virgin, the seers were asked to request the Lady for a sign to prove that it was indeed she who was appearing to them. In many instances, adverse natural phenomena preceded many of the apparitions. The night before the last apparition on October 13, 1917 in Fátima, a violent storm swept through all of Europe. At Lourdes, Bernadette's mother forbade her from venturing out to the grotto to gather wood with her playmates. In Belgium, several visions took place in rain and icy cold weather at Banneux, and similar conditions prevailed at Knock.⁷⁰

In a leading newspaper, *O Seculo*, reporter Avelino de Almeida described the 'Miracle of the Sun' as follows:

Before the astonished eyes of the crowd, whose aspect was Biblical as they stood bareheaded, eagerly searching the sky, the sun trembled, made sudden incredible movements outside all cosmic laws—the sun “danced” according to the typical expression of the people. ... People then began to ask each other what they had seen. The great majority admitted to having seen the trembling and dancing of the sun; others affirmed that they saw the face of the Blessed Virgin Mary; others, again swore that the sun whirled on itself like a giant Catherine wheel and that it lowered itself to the earth as if to burn it in its rays. Some said they saw it change colours successively. ...⁷¹

Many reported that the heat radiated by the sun had dried up their soaked clothes. Others reported healings had taken place by the time the sign had ended. Gabriel Andrade disagrees that everyone witnessed was what reported in *O Seculo* or *ODia*. Many in the crowd saw absolutely nothing extraordinary. He writes, “If the sun really did make such movements, it would have been detected by people in other locations. Yet, observatories all over the world

⁷⁰ Delaney, “Our Lady's Apparitions,” 17.

⁷¹ John De Marchi, *FÁTIMA from the Beginning*, trans. I. M. Kingsbury (Portugal: Missões Consolata Fátima, 2000), 136-137. *ODia*, another principal newspaper, also reported the Miracle of the Sun on October 17, 1917.

reported no unusual activity... It could also be that staring at the sun for too long caused perceptual disturbances in many people, aside from the fact that they already had the prior expectation that a miracle would happen.”⁷²

Nothing as dramatic was reported at La Salette and Lourdes, but the welling up of springs that became renowned for their healing properties at these sites were received as signs of divine initiative. According to Zimdars-Swartz, the best source of information about early interest in La Salette, are the letters of Abbé Pierre Mélin, the curé of Corps. When the curé visited the hallowed spot on September 28, 1846, he found people breaking up the rock on which the Virgin was believed to have sat, and pulling out the grass on which she was thought to have walked. Mélin instructed his sacristan and Maximin to remove what remained of the rock and to bring it back to the parish house at Corps. In addition, Mélin had acquired the two knapsacks in which the seers carried their daily provisions. Though the curé had established himself as the administrator of the supernatural at La Salette, he was forced to return most of it to the parish at La Salette when the new parish priest arrived. Pieces of the rock became prized possessions. When asked for a souvenir of the apparition site while in a local café, Maximin returned with a piece of the rock from someone he knew had a sample. When a lieutenant broke it with a hammer in order to share it, reports describe that half of the rock had the unmistakable face of Christ in the style of “Ecce Homo” imprinted on it, as witnessed by about thirty people. Other supernatural phenomena include healings connected with a miraculous spring a few steps from where the Virgin sat on the rock. There were many springs that fed a little brook where the shepherds led their animals to drink, but at the location near the rock where they left their

⁷² Gabriel Andrade, “The Political Manipulation of the Fatima Cult,” *The Prindle Post*, December 5, 2017, <https://www.prindlepost.org/2017/12/political-manipulation-fatima-cult/> (accessed May 3, 2019).

knapsacks, taken a nap, and then spoke with the woman, there was no spring. Most springs flow only after a rain, but this one has flowed continuously ever since.⁷³

At Lourdes, on February 25, 1858, during the ninth apparition, the Virgin instructed Bernadette, “Go and drink at the spring and wash yourself there.” A crowd watched as Bernadette crawled on her hands and knees to the back of the grotto where she began digging the ground on the direction of *Aquerò*⁷⁴. After sometime, she discovered muddy water that she smeared on her face and after several tries managed to drink some of it. Asked to explain her actions, she said that *Aquerò* had instructed her to drink at the spring and to wash in it. Later that day, some people continued digging at the same spot and finding a spring there, filled and carried bottles of water back home, suspecting that it had special powers. By March 4, reports of cures attributed to the water led more people to the grotto.

2.2.1.6 *Apparitions and Politics*

Blackbourn writes that the political threat of Communism in twentieth century Europe drove the response to Fátima and a number of apparitions after World War II. This was in stark contrast to other political enemies of the nineteenth century, namely liberalism and the ambitions of the modern state.⁷⁵ By the turn of the 19th century in Europe, the church within the Roman Empire wielded significant temporal power, touching almost every aspect of daily life playing property owner, employer, consumer, educator, purveyor of charity, and most importantly, guardian of the faith.⁷⁶ However, in a matter of years this political and institutional

⁷³ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 32-35.

⁷⁴ Bernadette referred to the Virgin Mary simply as *Aquerò* that means “that which [I am speaking of]” in Bigourdan, a French dialect spoken in the Lourdes area. See “The Virgin at La Salette and Lourdes: Whom Did the Children See?” Michael P. Carroll, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24, no. 1 (1985): 65.

⁷⁵ Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 22.

⁷⁶ See essays in *Church and Society in Catholic Europe of the Eighteenth Century*, eds. W. J. Callahan and D. Higgs (Cambridge, 1979), in Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 22.

dominance was overturned. Two Roman popes were exiled in France where Pius VI died.⁷⁷ Church lands were confiscated, foundations wound up, and ecclesiastical principalities of the former Roman Empire were abolished. Civil marriage was introduced, and religious pilgrimages and processions were curtailed or banned. In the face of these radical changes, popular piety spontaneously welcomed apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Civil authorities viewed the huge crowds at apparition sites and the heightened emotions aroused as a threat because apparitions and miracles served to legitimize resistance.⁷⁸

Apparitions were read as a sign of divine anger against unbelievers and a source of reassurance that the reign of godlessness would soon end. According to Blackbourn, these interpretations recurred during the nineteenth-century cycles of revolution and counterrevolution. Catherine Labouré's vision of the Virgin took place at the time of the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy that was to issue an attack on the Jesuit headquarters in Paris in July 1830, the desecration of Notre Dame, and the sacking of the archbishopric in the capital. That month, in the apparition to Labouré, the Virgin told Catherine about the calamities that would befall France. She appeared in blue and white, the colors of royalty in France together with emblems of innocence and purity. Her concerns were reflected in the mood of the faithful. The Miraculous Medal requested in the vision was struck in 1832 and soon became the most sought after talisman. The political message of the 1830 vision was echoed in subsequent apparitions. Lourdes (1858) was interpreted as a sign of support against the Second Empire. Pellevoisin (1876) carried apocalyptic prophecies and bore similar political messages in which the Virgin deplored the faithlessness of France and warned of a 'time of trials.'⁷⁹

⁷⁷ K.S. Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age* (New York: 1958), i, 147, in Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 22.

⁷⁸ Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 22-23.

⁷⁹ Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 23-24.

Apparitions tended to achieve greatest resonance at times when civil authorities were unsympathetic toward the masses. They viewed these events as fraud and deception as well politically motivated and sought to thwart their propagation by preventing the gathering of crowds. Lourdes demonstrates this predominance of civil power. The local police commissioner, an imperial prosecutor, and an examining magistrate questioned Bernadette. They attempted to declare her insane. Her father had to promise that she would not visit the grotto that was placed under interdict. The presence of soldiers and mounted police created a threatening atmosphere. Though none of these measures proved to be a deterrent to pilgrims, the parish priest urged people to resist confronting authorities. Finally, Napoleon III whose son was sent to Lourdes by Empress Eugenie and was cured of sunstroke contracted in Biarritz ordered the grotto open again. However, the fact remains that the power of the state had already been humbled.⁸⁰

After World War II ended in 1945, the message of Fátima became even more explicitly political. As with Bernadette's story, Ann Matter writes, the narrative of Fátima features the persistence of the marginalized in the face of the disapproving powerful. Lúcia and her cousins, Jacinta and Francisco, were caught between the displeasure of the state on one hand, and church authorities on the other. The situation worsened when they insisted that the Lady of their visions demanded the consecration of the world to her Immaculate Heart in return for the conversion of Russia and peace in the world. 'The Blue Army of Our Lady of Fátima' (now 'World Apostolate of Fátima') focused its attention on the 'godless Communism' of the former Soviet Union, including in its prayers petitions for the conversion of Russia.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 25-26.

⁸¹ E. Ann Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century: Apocalyptic, Representation, Politics," *Religion* 31 (2001): 128.

2.2.1.7 Pilgrimage Shrines and Basilicas as Symbols of Divine Initiative

Pilgrimages and the development of shrines and basilicas took a backseat during the Reformation because Martin Luther saw pilgrimage as type of “good work” that contravened the *sola fidei* principle.⁸² For Calvin, pilgrimage was an expression of false piety while Zwingli forbade the ritual. During parts of the Reformation, Thomas Thompson writes that iconoclasts destroyed shrines and images, and forbade veneration of saint relics.⁸³ However, even before the Reformers, in one of his satirical colloquies Erasmus questioned the purpose of pilgrimage. He found the whole idea pointless since God is omnipotent and one can pray to God from anywhere. He was also critical of petitioning saints and the Virgin Mary for divine assistance.⁸⁴ Pilgrimages began to recover with the Council of Trent sanctioning indulgences and veneration of images. When Leo XII declared 1825 as a Holy Year, he encouraged pilgrimages. Beginning in 1830 with Rue du Bac, Marian apparitions were reported at La Salette, Lourdes, Pontmain, and Pellevoisin. These apparitions significantly influenced the development of shrines and basilicas, and pilgrimages as a way of fostering Marian piety.⁸⁵

In many cases, the Virgin Mary requested that a chapel or a church built in her honor. As a result, following the tradition established by earlier apparitions, small chapels built on the sites of apparitions over time grew into major Marian sanctuaries and centers of pilgrimage to which thousands, even millions of pilgrims flock every year. Shrines pass on the stories of apparitions to future generations through oral narrative, written literature, enduring signs, and powerful symbols. Maunder writes that history has attested that these shrines stand as tangible

⁸² Cf. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 439-480, in Thompson, “Pilgrimages and Shrines: A Recognition Long Delayed,” 115.

⁸³ Thompson, “Pilgrimages and Shrines,” 115.

⁸⁴ Desiderius Erasmus, “A Pilgrimage for Religion’s Sake,” in *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 285-312.

⁸⁵ Thompson, “Pilgrimages and Shrines,” 116.

evidence of divine initiative that includes visions, healings, and miracles, transforming the once obscure, derelict, and irrelevant place into a sacred landscape by the presence of the light of the Blessed Virgin.⁸⁶ This feature only addresses shrines and basilicas as enduring symbols of Marian apparitions. The subject of pilgrimage to Marian apparition sites is a recurring theme that infuses Chapters 3 to 5, with a detailed explication in Chapter 6.

2.2.1.8 *Miraculous Photography*

In *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Mircea Eliade states that hierophanies involve the disclosure of the transcendent through matter and represent a numinous realm of an entirely different order from the profane world. Not only do deities or holy persons communicate the sacred but so do cosmic phenomena and the material structure of the world.⁸⁷ Increased dependence on modern technology in the twentieth century saw the evolution of miraculous photography with cameras becoming divinatory devices. Daniel Wojcik writes that the phenomenon has become “a form of divination, a technique of interpreting symbolic messages communicated by supernatural forces believed to shape the destiny of individuals and history itself,”⁸⁸ and that the creation of sacred images through photography has become a Catholic folk tradition associated with apparition sites.

Among the apparition sites where miraculous photography has evolved as a modern-day phenomenon is the video recording and pictures of the Virgin Mary appearing over and inside on the altar of a Coptic church in Zeitoun, Egypt, beginning in April 1968 through May 1971.⁸⁹ In June 1968, Veronica Leuken of Queens, New York, reported having visions of Mary (the

⁸⁶ Chris Maunder, *Our Lady of the Nations: Apparitions of Mary in Twentieth-Century Catholic Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9.

⁸⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred & The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 11-12, 116-17, in “Polaroids from Heaven: Photography, Folk Religion, and the Miraculous Image Tradition at a Marian Apparition Site,” Daniel Wojcik, *The Journal of American Folklore* 109, no. 432 (Spring 1996): 140.

⁸⁸ Wojcik, “Polaroids from Heaven,” 133.

⁸⁹ See official website <http://www.zeitun-eg.org/> for links to photo galleries and videos of the Zeitoun apparitions.

“Bayside” apparitions). Baysiders used Polaroid technology⁹⁰ to record images of Mary, Jesus, and the saints during apparitions. Wojcik claims that Polaroid cameras had become a modern version of hierophany, offering direct contact with the sacred beyond material proof of the presence of the supernatural, “providing the lens through which the divine is apprehended and God’s plan is brought into focus.”⁹¹ The profane act of photography transforms into sacred ritual. Modern forms of technology since the Polaroid, by extension of Wojcik’s thought, prove that at an apparition site, holy miracles are not the sole of domain of the Catholic Church, the saints, or those divinely chosen, but today are accessible to anyone in possession of such technology.

Ann Matter argues that the power of the miraculous photograph in part relates to the special character of the person holding the camera.⁹² Contrary to the perception that miraculous photography undermines the authority of art, it actually expands the aura of the sacred by replicating its signs, and increasing its presence among believers, allowing “for a proliferation of transportable sacred objects by reproducing the signs of the supernatural on photosensitive membranes.”⁹³ The understanding of these photos is what is important. They allow those who look at them to interpret, testify, and even prophesy. These photos created on sacred grounds become symbols of personal devotion and the recollection of past religious experiences. Not only do they emanate spiritual power, they also serve as the focal point of discussing one’s experiences of the divine, the apocalyptic, and the traditionalist ideology of the shrine.⁹⁴ They

⁹⁰ Though the Polaroid is obsolete today, its ability to develop a picture in seconds was the emerging technology in the 1960s and 1970s.

⁹¹ Wojcik, “Polaroids from Heaven,” 140.

⁹² Matter, “Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century,” 134.

⁹³ Wojcik, “Polaroids from Heaven,” 141.

⁹⁴ Wojcik, “Polaroids from Heaven,” 142.

serve as the holy breaking into the everyday, and are an example of contemporary religious esotericism whereby an individual receives grace to take these images or to understand them.⁹⁵

2.2.1.9 *Church Prudence, the Skepticism of the Rationalist, Detraction and Dissent*

As with other perceived supernatural phenomena, Marian apparitions have their detractors. In these matters, one must compare Church prudence with the attitude of the rationalist to appreciate the Church's approach to supernatural events like apparitions and manifestations. Christianity is a faith steeped in mystery, not one to be rationalized even though faith and reason inform each other. Lochet argues that the rationalist does not believe in apparitions because these events do not follow the logic of the natural order. Verbiage of "claims," "reports," "presumed," is the language of uncertainty. Lochet argues that in rejecting such phenomena, the rationalist rejects God's presence in the world and is unwilling to admit that God has acted in a way that requires human response. Lochet's argument is problematic because a rationalist may fully embrace the reality of God's action in the world in other ways while being suspicious or dismissive only of apparitions simply because the Church does not make belief in apparitions incumbent upon believers. Though the Church exercises prudence in the realm of apparitions, she does believe without limitations in God's personal action in history.⁹⁶

A rationalistic mindset also leads to a condescension of certain forms of popular piety that seem like inferior forms of prayer. Such an attitude prevents the person from fully entering into the spirit of Marian pilgrimages. Lochet argues that honoring Mary raises worship of her Son to another level, enabling the faithful to participate in the mystery of God's Word and

⁹⁵ Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 137.

⁹⁶ Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady*, 31-32.

Spirit.⁹⁷ What is needed, he affirms, is a double interpretation to bridge the gap between the supernatural event and interpretation of it—one on the level of feeling and the other of the intellect. It is necessary to get beyond the ideas and images to understand God's transcendence.

Relating contemporary apparitions to the miracles and revelations of Christ in the gospel or to the lives of saints is one way of understanding them in the right context. According to Lochet, the Church holds that supernatural revelations like Marian apparitions apply to particular vocations, lead to the introduction of a particular way of life or of special devotion, or with the reform and reorientation of a particular group of people. In this way, apparitions indirectly contribute to the common good of the Church. They become part of ecclesial life, but their message is addressed to a specific group of people, making their character strictly private.⁹⁸ The Church has officially recognized the divine origin of some of these apparitions, approved the building of shrines at these sites, and directed the propagation of their messages to the whole Church. Popes and bishops have visited these sites, associated themselves with devotions connected with pilgrimages, as well as used the teaching authority to instruct the faithful on the lessons drawn from these events. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church recognizes that these things are part of her life and the history of the people of God.⁹⁹

The Roman Catholic Church allows for personal discretion with respect to belief in apparitions even the most credible ones. Some Catholics restrict the scope of their belief and interest to only ecclesiastically approved apparitions. Others hold the view that even though the Church has not passed judgment on most apparitions and that not all negative decisions are necessarily irreversible, many apparitions reaffirm messages of earlier approved apparitions. Still

⁹⁷ Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady*, 35.

⁹⁸ Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady*, 46-47.

⁹⁹ Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady*, 48.

other Roman Catholics might hold the view that since her Assumption, the Blessed Virgin has never appeared on earth or communicated messages to anyone.¹⁰⁰

At the end of *The Evidence for the Visions of the Virgin Mary*, Kevin McClure offers a personal verdict that much of the evidence concerning visions, even the most celebrated ones, is hearsay. He is not convinced that Mary has appeared on earth after her Assumption. The reasons for his conclusion are that in the case of seven major visions in which reports claim the Virgin spoke, the seers were children, barely literate with little experience in life. He acknowledges the possibility that these children may have been more 'aware' and more 'sensitive' than others their age, due to their social upbringing and personal beliefs. The contemporary investigation was often improperly handled and incomplete, and the recording of witness accounts often took place long after the actual events. While prepared to accept that most of the visions were genuine for the visionaries, McClure doubts that the reported visions were of divine origin.¹⁰¹ What appears plausible for him is that the content of the visions emerges from "a contact with some sort of externalized form established by belief and hope over the years, and perceived by those who were prepared for it, who were in the right frame of mind ... similar to that experienced by Spiritualistic mediums and psychics."¹⁰²

McClure's detraction is an exercise of human faith and a prerogative granted to the faithful by the Church. However, there is another group of detractors whose refusal to accept a negative decision by the magisterial authority concerning reported apparitions has led to a schism with the Roman Catholic Church. Magnus Lundberg studied the Spanish Palmarian movement that emerged from reports of Marian apparitions in Palmar de Troya beginning in

¹⁰⁰ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 245-46.

¹⁰¹ Kevin McClure, *The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 151-52.

¹⁰² McClure, *Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary*, 151.

1968 in Andalusia.¹⁰³ The leading visionary, Clemente Dominguez, claimed that the messages he received from Christ and Mary criticized the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church, and announced the foundation of a new religious order by the Palmarians without Vatican approval.¹⁰⁴ Another leitmotif of these apparitions is the imminence of the end of the world. The Palmarian model fit well into an apocalyptic and millenarianist theme that characterizes a number of Marian apparitions.¹⁰⁵ The Palmarian Church evolved as a separate church with its own hierarchy of pope, bishops, priests, and nuns mostly from Spain and Ireland. It developed its own articles of faith that assigned Mary an almost equal status to Christ, declaring her co-redemptrix, co-mediatrix, and co-reparatrix, and anathematizing contrary views.¹⁰⁶ After much discord, secessions, and excommunications, membership in the Palmarian church has declined since the 1980s and 1990s, and it is likely no more than one thousand today.¹⁰⁷

2.2.2 Common Themes of Marian Apparition Messages

2.2.2.1 *Echoing the Messages of the Holy Spirit to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor*

As introduced at the beginning of this work, what the Holy Spirit is saying to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev 2 and 3) serves as a scriptural reference point. Though not historical fact, John's transcendent visions represent one of the first post-Pentecostal manifestations of the Spirit in which not only are the images, symbols, and motifs significant,

¹⁰³ Magnus Lundberg, "Fighting the Modern with the Virgin Mary: The Palmarian Church," *Novo Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 17, no. 2 (November 2013): 40.

¹⁰⁴ *Mensajes claves*, Apparitions, 29 January and 24 September 1974, in Lundberg, "Fighting the Modern," 44-46. The Palmarians reported that Jesus and Mary prophesied that most Christians would abandon faith and morals, horrendous wars and natural disasters would ensue, and true believers would be persecuted. Communism would take hold of humanity, a false pope would reign in the Vatican, and a true pope would lead the church militant in confronting its enemies. Then there would be "a period of peace and virtue," in which true believers would be victorious. During this time, people would convert and offer their allegiance to the true pope. After the period of peace, people would revert to unfaithfulness and sinful ways leading to a final world war that would end creation.

¹⁰⁵ Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 130, in Lundberg, "Fighting the Modern," 44-45.

¹⁰⁶ Lundberg, "Fighting the Modern," 46-51. Though these titles are part of Roman Catholic tradition, they are not dogma.

¹⁰⁷ Lundberg, "Fighting the Modern," 52-55.

but so are the messages with their underlying meaning. According to Leonard Thompson, the language of the visions, grounded in the Spirit's messages, does not represent a symbolic universe alternate to the concrete world of Asian Christians of the time, but instead present a lens through which those Christians may comprehend the proper meaning of objects and relationships in their daily life.¹⁰⁸ In those communications, the Spirit describes the churches' situations, accuses, warns and admonishes them, as well as promises good things to those who persevere in the faith.¹⁰⁹ The tones, themes, requests, and rewards of the message appear to resonate with the content of the messages verbalized by Mary in many of her apparitions, particular those in the modern period. John's letter, albeit ahistorical, has particular import for every generation including the Church of the contemporary age. There appears to be a parallel in the themes of crisis, comfort, hope, exhortation, and consolation that characterize the "apocalypse" genre¹¹⁰ between what the Spirit is saying to the churches and what Mary through her apparitions is saying to the people of God. Just as the Spirit is addressing all churches and not just one of them, Mary's messages are not addressed to the seers alone, but to all believers.

¹⁰⁸ Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 180.

¹⁰⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 46, 55-56. Schüssler Fiorenza points out that the Spirit's messages have a rhetorical pattern of rebuke or warning. The prophetic formula entails a description of the situation, censure followed by a command to repent, a prophetic-revelatory warning, the promise of Christ's return, and an exhortation to persevere. John's ahistorical letter is explicitly polemical about false Christian prophets in the communities at Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira. Ephesus rejected these prophets and earned praise for despising the works of Nicolaitans; Pergamum is criticized for failing to rebuke those who held on to the teachings of Balaam; Thyatira provoked censure for accepting the influence and teaching of Jezebel. One may think of today's false prophets as those who advocate against God's law and church teachings, as well as those who manipulate scripture and church teachings to justify their theological positions.

¹¹⁰ Apocalypse is not defined simply as "revelatory literature" but as disclosing transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world (John J. Collins, *Semeia 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, 1979). To this *Semeia 14* definition, Yarbro Collins adds the qualification that apocalypse is intended to interpret present, earthly situations in light of the supernatural and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and behavior of hearers by means of divine authority ("Introduction," *Semeia* 36:1-11, 1986, 7), in Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 31-32.

Mary's message carries the eschatological promise of the Spirit to a wider audience, and not just the community to whom the messages are given.¹¹¹

2.2.2.2 *Continuity with Tradition and Development of the Apocalyptic*

Many Marian apparitions exhort traditional Christian practices like Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, the Eucharist, as well as gospel themes of repentance, reparation, and conversion. Understanding the apocalyptic nature of Mary's messages is important because it is the warnings with their political dimension that draws the attention of ecclesiastical hierarchy as well as of the faithful. The church exercises prudence with modern apparitions that deal with this theme. Though apocalyptic content never usually finds its way into devotional material, they are an indicator that Mary seems to read the signs of the times with special insight. Through these messages, the local community and the world are warned about the catastrophic and inevitable consequences of the abuse of human free will, and the rejection of God.

Of the three pre-World War II apparitions, La Salette and Fátima, highlight the development of a transcultural apocalyptic ideology of Marian apparitions centered on maternal imagery.¹¹² Zimdars-Swartz writes that this ideology is an apocalyptic worldview developed out of the images and themes prominent in these and other more recent apparitions. In fact, some of the recent apparitions such as Garabandal, San Damiano, and Medjugorje seem anchored in any one or combination of these three apparitions.¹¹³

What are some of the images and themes that define this ideology? In response to this question, Zimdars-Swartz points out that these apparitions project the image of a divinely

¹¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 46.

¹¹² Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 19.

¹¹³ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 246.

appointed figure who intervenes in history to change the course of events by interceding before God. Believers in most modern apparitions assume that Mary is the one appointed by God to perform these intervening and interceding functions; intercession here involves interaction with divine law represented by God in the Persons of the Trinity, and Mary's mercy. In this image, humanity has turned its back on God requiring that divine justice demand immediate chastisement. The cowherds of La Salette were allegedly told by the Virgin that her Son's hand was "so heavy and pressing" that she could no longer restrain it. The sins that Our Lady communicated as most offensive were working on Sunday, swearing in her Son's name, not attending Mass, mocking religion, and eating meat during Lent. War, famine, catastrophic illness, and other natural calamities in this worldview are perceived as both chastisements for sin as well as inducements or admonitions to reform or conversion.¹¹⁴

Of the prophetic apparitions of the modern era, Fátima is likely the most apocalyptic. The first and second parts of the "secret," as revealed to the three *pastorinhos*, refer to a frightening vision of hell, devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, World War II, and the prediction that Russia would do immense damage to humanity by thwarting religion and embracing Communism.¹¹⁵ The CDF explains that the key message of the first and second parts of the "secret" is "to save souls" while that of the third part is penance. The third vision of Fátima concerns the war waged by atheistic systems against the Church and Christians, and describes the suffering that witnesses of the faith will endure in the twentieth century. "It is an interminable *Way of the Cross* led by the Popes of the twentieth century."¹¹⁶ Even with the fall of Communism in 1989 and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union, Fátima remains

¹¹⁴ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 246-49.

¹¹⁵ CDF, "Message of Fatima." By way of contrast, it is surprising that Mary seems unbothered by Western consumerism and the evils of unfettered capitalism.

¹¹⁶ CDF, "Message of Fatima."

only partially fulfilled. John Paul II states that Mary's call to conversion and penance at Fátima is timely and urgent for every generation, especially today. Her calls manifest her maternal concern for the fate of a humanity in need of conversion and forgiveness.¹¹⁷

The Virgin of Fátima, as reported by Lúcia years later, told the three shepherd children in the second part of the "secret" that if people did not stop offending God, another greater war would begin during the papacy of Pius XI. According to Zimdars-Swartz, here transgressions against a ritually defined sacred order includes the collapse of faith in God, the sin of atheism, and the errors of Russia. The apocalyptic worldview of this modern apparition is not fatalistic, but one of hope and triumph. The message of Fátima offers a chance at redemption through prayer, reparation, repentance, and conversion of heart that leads penitents back to God. As with some earlier as well as later apparitions, Mary made tangible requests to avert catastrophe. At Fátima, she requested the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart and the Communion of Reparation on First Saturdays. In return for fulfilling these requests, she promised the conversion of Russia and peace in the world.¹¹⁸

McInerny writes that from the vantage point of Fátima, there is little doubt that Marxism and the Soviet Union are the scourge God is using to call humanity to repentance. However, like Zimdars-Swartz, he believes that the overarching message is one of hope that reveals what to do to be saved and for a period of peace to be granted to the world. Mary's messages to the shepherd children indicate there must be suffering, reparation for sin, and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Indulgences are obtained by going to Mass and

¹¹⁷ John Paul II, *Message for the 1997 World Day of the Sick*, no. 1, *Insegnamenti*, XIX, 2 (1996): 561, in CDF, "Message of Fatima."

¹¹⁸ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 248.

receiving the Eucharist on the first Saturdays of five consecutive months, confessing one's sins, and praying for the Holy Father.¹¹⁹

Then Prefect of the CDF, Joseph Ratzinger, asks the question: "What is the meaning of the "secret" of Fátima as a whole (in its three parts)? What does it say to us?" With all the media attention on the "third" part, those expecting apocalyptic predictions were disappointed. Apparitions are not reducible to objects of mere curiosity. What remains is an exhortation to prayer, and a summons to peace and conversion as the path that leads to the "salvation of souls."¹²⁰ With waves of attacks against the Church and against Christians, and with Russia continuing to spread her errors, "Is Fátima really fulfilled?" is the question on which to ponder.

2.2.2.3 *Other Aspects of Interpretation*

Not all apparitions have a clearly spoken message. Most are not alarmist or apocalyptic. They are not chastising and do not predict end times. However, when discerned holistically, they lead to new prophetic interpretations, sometimes with the help of supernatural signs and symbols that accompany these visions. Some of these apparitions, Laurentin asserts, "underline evangelization and ecumenism and remind us of the priority to be given to the poor."¹²¹ This study assesses these implications of Marian apparitions and manifestations together with interreligious unity in terms of their impact on the local and world church.

2.2.2.3.1 Evangelization

Almost every apparition contains an explicit or implicit invitation to evangelization of which the Church has become conscious through other means since the fourth Synod of 1974. The new evangelization, first called for by Paul VI received greater momentum during the

¹¹⁹ McInerney, *Miracles*, 108.

¹²⁰ CDF, "Message of Fatima."

¹²¹ Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 127.

papacy of John Paul II. Though Benedict XVI continued the legacy of John Paul II, it is likely that he was the force behind the impetus given to the new evangelization by the latter. Francis reminds us that evangelization must extend beyond the proclamation of the Word; it must be active, especially in the Church's priority and response to the poor. Turning to the world of apparitions, Cuapa, Kibeho, Damascus, Medjugorje, and Schio explicitly call for a 'return to God,' an invitation to evangelization characterized by a dynamic and joyful urgency.¹²² At Vailankanni in India, on the other hand, the invitation is implicit and even complex given that the common pilgrim is predominantly Hindu, or a person of a faith besides Christianity. A mode of evangelization that underpins this apparition, as explicated in Chapter 3, is interfaith encounter without which evangelization in this context cannot be effective.

2.2.2.3.2 Ecumenism

Apparitions that took place in Egypt (Zeitoun, al-Shoubra, Assiut, and Warraq el-Haddar), Syria (Damascus), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Medjugorje) invite evangelization without aggression, proselytism, or recourse to superficial media techniques, and encourage ecumenism. At Zeitoun for instance, Mary reportedly appeared to an interreligious gathering of Coptic Christians, Protestants, Jews, and Muslims who exalt her in the Qur'an. Damascus and Medjugorje, Laurentin writes, "deal with an ecumenism based on love, without which smiles, dialogue and negotiation would all be in vain (*Messages et Pedagogie de Marie à Medjugorje*, 317-322)."¹²³ Chapter 4 is a historical-critical study of the manifestations at Zeitoun, and Chapter 6 provides a synthesis of the implications of the Spirit's action through Mary on ecumenical discourse in the life of the Church.

¹²² Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 127.

¹²³ Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 127.

2.2.2.3.3 Interreligious Unity

Evangelization uses the power of God and gift of prayer to bring about ecumenical and interreligious unity.¹²⁴ Marian apparitions have had an impact on interreligious unity as exemplified at Vailankanni where reports claim Mary appeared to Hindu boys, and that she saved Portuguese sailors from drowning. At Zeitoun, she repeatedly appeared to people of different faiths over a period of three years. At both these locations, Christians pray alongside their religious other in a display of unity that is rare. Chapter 3 is a historical-critical study of Vailankanni and Hindu-Christian relations in South India. Zeitoun is unique in that it not only has an ecumenical dimension, but also an interreligious aspect, addressed in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 discusses the permanent and prophetic implications of these apparitions.

2.2.2.3.4 Priority of the Poor

The visionaries in many of the Virgin's apparitions hail from simple to modest backgrounds, typically rural, agricultural or close to nature, that inspired many gospel parables. The word 'poor' is to be understood in a gospel sense¹²⁵ where Jesus asks his followers to strip themselves of the goods and possessions of this world and "come follow me" (Matt 19:21).¹²⁶ The visionaries and their families are content with their situation in life. They may be poor, but are not miserable. As the cult of the saints was gradually replaced by the cult of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in nineteenth-century Europe, a two-tier perception of Catholic popular culture

¹²⁴ Mainstream Catholic doctrine holds that Mary has an important role in the economy of salvation, and honors her as preeminent among all saints. Despite confining her to the last chapter of *Lumen gentium*, the fact that an ecumenical council insisted on clarifying her role suggests that she is not an obstacle, but a means to Christian unity (McInerney, *Miracles*, 88).

¹²⁵ Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 128.

¹²⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez articulates the ways scripture uses the word 'poor,' in a material, spiritual, and voluntary sense. A 'preferential option for the poor' means to stand in solidarity with the poor. Therefore, to make an option for the poor is to make an option for Christ. See "Option for the Poor," Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, eds. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 235-250.

took hold: “peasants worship primitively and superstitiously, while the upper classes and the intelligentsia practiced their religion intellectually.”¹²⁷ Though apparitions draw attention to the modest conditions of the visionaries, it has not raised the prestige of apparitions in the eyes of the Church or the state. In fact, Laurentin notes, their condition is somewhat frowned upon. They are viewed as naïve. Their rustic background suggests lacking in education, and the imprecision of their language bereft of theological rigor or knowledge of the human sciences. Their extraordinary sanctity is deemed weakness, and there is little hesitation in labeling their visions as hallucinations or hysteria. Sadly, those of elitist mindset “are not aware that these poor people often have a nobility which is due to the quality of their lives and their humanity.”¹²⁸ Marian apparitions often suggest the need for divine intervention in economic and other contemporary crises.¹²⁹ Ironically, as apparitions become more established, these elite become envious of the very lot they would have otherwise despised. At the same time, those who follow apparitions place significant emphasis on the sanctity of the poor and their presence among the people of God.¹³⁰

2.2.3 Three Case Studies

Despite his minimalist position concerning Marian apparitions, McClure is curious to learn why reported Marian apparitions attract a significant following of believers. This study takes up this question in pneumatological perspective not only with respect to approved apparitions, but also with respect to those for which there is “no decision” and yet attract a significant following. As Agnieszka Halemba affirms, establishing the veracity of apparitions (*origins*) is not of crucial importance. What is important are the *effects* they have on Marian

¹²⁷ Tom Zaniello, “Cyberspace and the Virgin,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 18, no. 2 (April 1996): 81.

¹²⁸ Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 128.

¹²⁹ Zaniello, “Cyberspace and the Virgin,” 82.

¹³⁰ Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 129.

devotion and piety in the life of the church.¹³¹ What is important is the understanding of apparitions as the phenomenology of religion,¹³² and how claims of direct experience of the supernatural are extremely powerful and effective tools of argumentation and negotiation.¹³³ Three cases that explicate these viewpoints are included in this study—one for which there has been no decision for centuries (Vailankanni), one for which there is episcopal approval by the Coptic Church (Zeitoun), and one that has Vatican approval though the testimonies of only three visionaries are deemed authentic (Kibeho).

The three chapters that follow cover a historical-critical analysis in conjunction with comparative studies of religion of each case followed by an assessment of their implications for the local Church. Narrative elements of each apparition look at the background of visionaries' social location, what took place during Mary's appearances, the content of spoken or unspoken messages, the process of investigation and approvals, and the enduring signs, symbols, and miracles that might offer new interpretations of revelation. Such historical-critical analysis of an apparition entails understanding the social, cultural, economic, and political influences on the religious context established by the religious traditions involved in each case. The liberating aspects in terms of human flourishing, and how they are manifested, and sustained over time are included in each synthesis. The end of each chapter includes a discussion of the manifestations of the Spirit's work that is consequential to reception by the community of believers and transformative for the life of the local church.

¹³¹ Agnieszka Halemba, *Negotiating Marian Apparitions: The Politics of Religion in Transcarpathian Ukraine* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015), 277.

¹³² Zimdars-Swartz employs the "phenomenology of religion" as the method for studying the apparitions included in *Encountering Mary*. The term, first conceived by Gerardus Van der Leuw (see *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. Gerardus Van der Leuw, trans. Ninian Smart and John E. Turner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014)), was popularized by Mircea Eliade.

¹³³ Halemba, *Negotiating Marian Apparitions*, 279.

CHAPTER 3

Vailankanni Arrokiya Matha Mother of Health, Vailankanni

The apparitions at Vailankanni consists of two reported appearances of the Virgin Mary on separate occasions to Hindu boys (a shepherd and a buttermilk vendor) in the 16th century and a manifestation that Portuguese sailors claim rescued them during a tempest in the mid-17th century. This case presents an opportunity to study the historical, ritual, and social contexts of a hallowed, religiously plural landscape that has shaped Hindu-Christian relations in the church of Southeast India. The Holy See has not officially recognized Vailankanni as a supernatural manifestation of the Virgin Mary in large part because of its close association with local forms of popular piety. This chapter consists of three sections. The first describes the indigenous, apostolic, and Marian foundations of the Vailankanni cult followed by an understanding of the growth and development of the Shrine Basilica, and the annual Vailankanni festival. The second is a historical-critical analysis of the sociocultural and political influences that shaped devotion and piety. The final section is a synthesis of Vailankanni in terms of Hindu-Catholic religiosity, current communal relations, liberation for the marginalized in the caste-based orientation of Indian society, and an assessment of the implications of Vailankanni for evangelization in terms of interreligious dialogue and inculturation. Before discussing the foundational theories of the cult, a brief background of Vailankanni is essential.

3.0 Vailankanni: A Brief Background

The Landscape

Located on the southern Coromandel Coast of peninsular India and facing the Bay of Bengal, Vailankanni,¹ a once-insignificant hamlet originally inhabited by fishermen, is today a

¹ A. Arokianathan, "Vailankanni as Tourist and Pilgrimage Centre" (Ph.D. dissertation, St. Joseph's College, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, 2009), 30. Etymological variations in meaning of the Tamil

busy panchayat township 350 km south of Chennai (formerly Madras) and about 8 km south of the seaport of Nagapattinam in the southeastern state of Tamil Nadu. It was at Vailankanni in the mid-17th century that Portuguese seamen built the first Catholic chapel consecrated to *Nossa Senhora da Saúde* in gratitude to Mother Mary. Soon thereafter, Portuguese fathers of the Franciscan Order from nearby Nagapattinam administered the chapel that grew and developed into what is known today as the Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health (*Punita Arokkiya Annai Tiruttala Peralaya*²) amidst a landscape dotted with temples and mosques, typical of southern India. Nagapattinam has several Hindu temples dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva, and Saniswara. A few miles down the road is a famous Muslim *dargah*, where the body of the fifteenth-century Sufi *pir*, Shahul Hamid, also known as the Muhammadan saint Mirán Sâhib, is enshrined in Nagore. Nagore celebrates a twelve-day festival annually in autumn and attracts a large concourse of pilgrims, including Brâhman Hindus who make vows at the tomb.³ Mother of Health, referred to as *Arrokiya Matha* (ஆரோக்கிய அன்னை in Tamil), is considered a Virgin of Indian origin⁴ because of her reported appearances to two Hindu boys in the 16th century and for manifestly interceding the rescue of Portuguese sailors in a cyclone that hit the Bay mid-17th century.

Pilgrim and Commercial Activity

The landscape of Vailankanni is a convergence of three faiths with devotional and commercial activity bustling around their sacred sites. Annually thousands of local, national and

'kanni' in Vailankanni have led to variations in spelling: Velankanni (Virgin of the town of *Velai*); Vailankanni (canal of the river Vellâr or Vellaiâr that flows alongside of the church), and Velanganni, arising out of Tamil to English transliteration. All three spellings are officially accepted.

² Matthias Frenz, "The Virgin and Her 'Relations': Reflections on Processions at a Catholic Shrine in Southern India," in *South Asian Religions on Display: Religious Processions in South Asia and in the Diaspora*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (New York: Routledge, 2008), 95.

³ Vasudha Narayanan, "Sacred land, common ground, contested territory: the healing mother of Velankanni Basilica and the Infant Jesus Shrine in Bangalore," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 17 (2004): 21; Vasudha Narayanan, "Religious Vows at the Shrine of Shahul Hamid," in *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*, eds. Selva J. Raj and William P. Harman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 65-66.

⁴ Matthias Frenz, "Virgin and Her 'Relations,'" 95.

international pilgrims flock to this destination, especially for the Marian patronal festival that begins at the end of August. This religiously plural landscape is marked by varying levels of disorganization, but what is apparent is the similarity in pilgrim ritual activity.⁵ The area around the shrine, temples, and dargahs is crowded with shops selling souvenirs and devotional objects. Vailankanni pilgrims are primarily Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and less noticeably, followers of other faiths. During the festival pilgrims come from states adjacent to Tamil Nadu, but also from Maharashtra, Goa, and West Bengal. According to Vailankanni church volunteers and processional palanquin bearers, a majority of the festival pilgrims are Mumbai residents who identify themselves as Goan, East Indian, occasionally Tamilian, and many who work in the Persian Gulf.⁶ Vailankanni, however, is not all about Christians. It is one of the unique places of pilgrimage in India and the world, where one finds Hindus, Muslims, and Christians praying together. In fact, at any given time, Hindus who visit the shrine far outnumber Christians.

Pilgrim statistics situates Vailankanni in the global context of the Catholic Church's four most recognized Marian apparitions: Guadalupe (1531), La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1958), and Fátima (1917). Their shared association with miraculous healing, however, connects Vailankanni to Lourdes, the former often referred to as the "Lourdes of the East"⁷ after what John Paul II called the sanctuary in a 2001.⁸ The tenth "World Day of the Sick" was observed here in 2002, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the shrine's elevation to "minor basilica" by John

⁵ Narayanan, "Religious Vows at the Shrine of Shahul Hamid," 66.

⁶ Margaret Meibohm, "Past Selves and Present Others: The Ritual Construction of Identity at a Catholic Festival in India," in *Popular Christianity in India: Riting between the Lines*, eds. Selva J. Raj and Corrine G. Dempsey (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 65.

⁷ Thomas C. Nagy, *Catholic Shrines in Chennai, India: The Politics of Renewal and Apostolic Legacy* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 187.

⁸ John Paul II, "Message of the Holy Father for the World Day of the Sick in 2002" (August 6, 2001) at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/sick/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20010813_world-day-of-the-sick-2002.html. Also see: John Paul II, Angelus (31 July 1988) at The Holy See, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19880731.html.

XXIII. As such, Vailankanni is a liminal land on the map and an integral connection between the Roman Catholic and western world on one hand, and the Far East on the other.⁹

Spread of the Cult

Under the Portuguese (1534 – 1600) and before the arrival of the Dutch, the Vailankanni cult spread to Goa and Diu where churches dedicated to Mary are the focal point of worship. Today Vailankanni has evolved into an international pilgrimage destination, third only to Lourdes and Fátima in terms of number of pilgrims. There are more than 9,000 devotional internet websites. An estimated 20 million pilgrims arrive annually from all over India, and as far as Europe, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.¹⁰ The Indian Christian diaspora propagates devotion to Vailankanni through word of mouth. In India, the narrative is popular where there is a substantial Christian population that circulates the Vailankanni message through pamphlets, newsletters, and bulletins they receive. However, as Rila Mukherjee writes, history has remained silent about Vailankanni, and unfortunately, “it merits no mention in the annals of the Portuguese or in the district gazetteers of colonial India.”¹¹

Historical Documentation

Historical documentation on Vailankanni is rare to find. Even the *Madras District Gazetteer - Tanjore* (1906) dedicated a mere half page to this non-descript village on the southeastern seaboard of India. The following is an abstract from the gazette:

Vélanganni: Six miles south of Negapatnam at the mouth of the Kadvaiyar river. Population 2,744; contains a police station and two private markets. It is chiefly important for a very large Roman Catholic festival which takes place here every eight of September and the nine preceding days in honour of the Virgin Mary as ‘Our Lady of Health.’ Not Christians only, but Hindus also, come to this from many parts of the Presidency in the hope of obtaining relief from sickness, and many miraculous cures are said to take place.

⁹ Narayanan, “Sacred land, common ground, contested territory,” 27.

¹⁰ Rila Mukherjee, “Contested Authenticities,” *Rethinking History* 8, no. 3 (September 2004): 462.

¹¹ Mukherjee, “Contested Authenticities,” 463. One exception is the *Madras District Gazetteer* referenced in Arokianathan, “Vailankanni as Tourist and Pilgrimage Centre,” 30.

The village has indeed been called the ‘Lourdes of India.’ The attendance at the festival is estimated at 30,000, and the income derived from offerings at Rs. 10,000. The origin of the shrine is obscure, but the most commonly accepted account is that 200 or 300 years ago a wealthy Portuguese merchant, returning from China, was overtaken by a cyclone in the Bay, and vowed an altar to the Virgin if she saved him; thereupon his vessel was guided in safety to Vélánganni, which it reached on the eighth of September. The merchant accordingly erected a little chapel to Our Lady of Health, which forms at present the choir of the modern church. The chapel was long in charge of the Portuguese Franciscans, but since 1847 secular priests from Mylapore have officiated. The building is not particularly impressive either outside or inside.¹²

Vailankanni Today

In 2005, this township had an estimated population of 12,000, but the number keeps rising due to the influx of new settlers. The place has all the facilities of a flourishing town including a post office, banks, hospitals, higher secondary schools, medical stores, a home for the aged and the disabled, a telephone exchange, a bus station, all within walking distance from the shrine.¹³ Even though this destination seems self-contained, and despite its proximity to Nagapattinam, it is off the beaten path for most Indians. Word of mouth is still its best advertisement, and its location on the shores of the Bay of Bengal make it an attractive destination for pilgrimage tours and a photo opportunity for sightseers and tourists.

¹² F.R. Hemingway, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tanjore*, ed. W. Francis (Madras: Government Press, 1906), 243. The original ‘District Manual’ published in 1883, was written by Dīwán Bahádur Venkaswami Rao. This text shows that Vailankanni was likened to Lourdes long before John Paul II called her ‘Lourdes of the East’ in 2001, or during a Sunday Angelus in 1988. Though the apparitions at Vailankanni occurred approximately 200 to 300 years before Lourdes and both are reputed for miraculous healing, it is Lourdes that wields reference power.

¹³ S.L. Gabriel, I. Arokiasamy, P. Xavier, D. Amudhan, A. Philomin Raj, and S. Kulandainathan, *The History of the Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni “The Lourdes of the East”* (Vailankanni: Shrine Publication, 2005), 13-14.

3.1 Foundational Theories of the Origins of the Vailankanni Cult

Vailankanni is a confluence of different types of encounters—interreligious, multicultural, local, and international. In *Locality, History, Memory: The Making of the Citizen in South Asia*, Mukherjee writes, “The story of the Vailankanni cult offers us a glimpse of myriad encounters between local lores and Catholicism. ...we find not one encounter, but several, as Portuguese colonialism sought to displace the original territorial and sacral associations of Vailankanni by coopting them into the larger canvas of sixteenth century European Catholicism.”¹⁴ She identifies three foundational myths concerning the origins of Vailankanni—indigenous, apostolic, and Marian together with their local and international dimensions.¹⁵ For a timeline on the events associated with Vailankanni, see Appendix A.

3.1.1 Indigenous Origins

According to this theory, the Vailankanni cult evolved in the 16th century from a blending of the *Krsna* cult¹⁶ practiced in Tamil Nadu at the time, and the cult of *Ave Stella Maris* (Hail Star of the Sea) that believed in Mary’s allegorical role as the guiding star for seafarers, carried forward to this day. From the beginning, as a sacred myth suggests, Vailankanni may have been a local deity closely associated with healing and caring of the sick. Female deities, mother goddesses, or *shakti* figures associated with curative powers, were coopted into Indian Catholic faith during Portuguese rule. Village folk had to adjust to hegemony and violence of the

¹⁴ Rila Mukherjee, “Locality, History, Memory: Vailankanni and a New Geography of Citizenship,” in *Locality, History, Memory: The Making of the Citizen in South Asia*, ed. Rila Mukherjee and M. N. Rajesh (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 159-163.

¹⁵ Mukherjee, “Locality, History, Memory,” 159.

¹⁶ Jan Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens, vol. 1: Veda und alterer Hinduismus* (Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), 52, in *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Krsna Devotion in South India*, Friedhelm Hardy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 18. The Mahabharata portrays Krsna as a god who entered human history, but Hardy questions whether such ‘scandalous’ features (such as god as a historical person) were acceptable in the age when the epic was conceived.

Portuguese by permitting the integration of their local deities into the Christian pantheon, especially those associated with curative powers, miracles, and bountiful harvests.¹⁷

One such goddess was Mariamman, to whom there is a temple in Vailankanni. Early missionary reports indicate that Mariamman focused primarily on the small pox epidemic that sometimes wiped out whole villages during the hot, dry months from January to June. Village worshippers of this deity believed that the absence of rain, and therefore a bountiful harvest, as well as the presence of this dreaded disease were in some way related to the failings of the community for not being in proper touch with the natural order with which they worked, incurring Mariamman's wrath.¹⁸ For this reason, she was a negative goddess, feared for what she could do, not loved because of what she did.¹⁹ Paul Younger writes that to appease the goddess, the worshipping community would pronounce vows, slay scarce animals, and engage in wild, ecstatic dances, so that their village might be spared the dreadful epidemic.²⁰ He points out that "the underlying pattern of worship in the Velankanni pilgrimage festival is that found in the worship of the goddess Mariamman. The preparatory vows, the shaving of the hair, the presentation of offerings, the frenetic worship, the sharing in the worship of others, and the ecstatic moments around the central shrine make up a pattern these villagers would have known from childhood in connection with the shrines of Mariamman."²¹

¹⁷ Mukherjee, "Locality, History, Memory," 160. Mukherjee offers the example of the deity Shantadurga of Goa, who in her folk form of Santeri Mata, was christianized as Our Lady of Miracles; in other forms that evolved in sixteenth-century Goa, she came to be known as Our Lady of Good Health and Our Lady of Cures.

¹⁸ W. T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1915) and H. Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1921), in "Velankanni Calling: Hindu Patterns of Pilgrimage at a Christian Shrine," Paul Younger, *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Alan Morinis (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 95.

¹⁹ Mukherjee, "Locality, History, Memory," 170.

²⁰ Younger, "Velankanni Calling," 95.

²¹ Younger, "Velankanni Calling," 94; Mukherjee, "Locality, History, Memory," 170.

What explains the transition from devotion to the indigenous goddess Mariamman to Vailankanni Arrokiya Matha? Though Younger does not address this specific question, his essay offers three plausible explanations. First, Arrokiya Matha's reputation as a "mother," takes on a liberating dimension by focusing attention on the personal and family-based nature of the "troubles" the poor face in the contemporary situation. Second, the seacoast setting provides a sense of the mysterious, primordial realm that the goddess controls. Third, the triumphant tone of the Mother-Child image of Vailankanni "gives the basic Tamil polarity a sufficiently new form so that it provides hope and confidence to those who feel distraught and oppressed."²² Though the logic of past thought attributed misfortunes to the inadequacy of worship by the community, at Vailankanni it was the mother of each family, not the community, who assumed responsibility for making vows and having rituals carried out to appease the goddess in order to restore well-being to the family. These mothers preferred the "new" goddess Vailankanni over Mariamman as she presented a more acceptable way of dealing with family problems, much of the ritual protocol remaining the same.²³

3.1.2 Apostolic Origins

According to the tradition of the Syro-Malabar church, the missionizing legacy of St. Thomas the Apostle during his first century voyage to India led to the founding of the first Christian communities in India. Several Catholic shrines named in his honor in modern-day Chennai preserve his memory. Thomist Christian practice originated on the Malabar Coast and then the Coromandel among a considerable community of natives claiming to have received their faith from the Apostle. For several centuries, St. Thomas' tomb was believed to be in the hands of the Nestorians with oversight by Nestorian bishops from Persia or Babylonia. From a

²² Younger, "Velankanni Calling," 95.

²³ Younger, "Velankanni Calling," 95-96.

liturgical perspective, these Christians became Syrian Christians. When the Portuguese arrived in the 16th century, they were keen on bringing this Christian community into union with the Catholic Church by freeing them from the Nestorian taint, destroying their ancient records in southern India. Their communion with the Bishop of Rome was promulgated at the Synod of Udayamperur (Diamper) in 1599.²⁴

What is the association between the Syrian Christians and Vailankanni? Syrian Christianity revealed parallels between Hindu and Christian beliefs; Mary was considered the sister of *Kali* while Jesus was venerated along with *Krsna*, making it easier to look to Mary as another goddess of the Hindu pantheon. Mukherjee points out that, “if we accept the Thomist associations of Vailankanni, we find that there were a series of ‘encounters’ or adjustments between Thomism and Portuguese Catholic faith at the time when the cult first appeared as a Marian shrine.”²⁵ She notes that in 1653 Syrian Catholics were under three apostolic vicariates—Ernakulam, Trichur, and Changanacherry. Domestic quarrels of jurisdiction between these vicariates and the Portuguese *padroado*²⁶ or patronage soon arose. The conflict that began in the 18th century peaked in 1838, with a settlement reached in 1886.

3.1.3 Marian Origins

Although there is neither historical nor archaeological evidence to confirm that the Virgin Mary appeared at Vailankanni, oral tradition passed down narratives of two visions and

²⁴ Mukherjee, “Locality, History, Memory,” 160.

²⁵ Mukherjee, “Locality, History, Memory,” 161.

²⁶ Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India. Volume II: From the Middle of the Sixteenth to the End of the Seventeenth Century (1542 – 1700)* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1982), 414fn. *Padroado* is Portuguese for patronage that implied both rights and duties. In the 15th and 16th centuries, The Holy See granted the King of Portugal the right to nominate candidates to all ecclesiastical offices in the region as reward for paying the expenses to evangelize the countries of Africa and Asia. Holders of this right were obligated to spread the Christian faith, and to establish and maintain the Church in their area of assignment.

one manifestation of the Virgin at or near this quiet village in the 16th and 17th centuries. These visions and manifestation are:

1. Apparition of Our Lady to a shepherd boy
2. Apparition of Our Lady to a crippled buttermilk vendor
3. Manifestation of Our Lady rescues Portuguese sailors from shipwreck

Historical details of each apparition of Mary are taken from the shrine publication, *The History of the Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni “The Lourdes of the East”*²⁷ supported by the work of S. R. Santos’ *The Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health, Vailankanni*.²⁸

3.1.3.1 Apparition of Our Lady to a Shepherd Boy²⁹

In the mid-16th century, alongside Anna Pillai Street in Vailankanni there was a huge banyan tree on the bank of a small pond. Travelers and passers-by would quench their thirst with water from the pond or take a dip to cool themselves from the sweltering heat. A Hindu shepherd boy named Tamil Krishnannesti Sankaranarayanan from Vailankanni used to pass by the pond everyday carrying milk for his wealthy master, a Hindu Vellala man who lived 10 km away in Nagapattinam. On an unusually hot summer day, the boy lay down to rest in the shade under the banyan tree after quenching his thirst with water from the pond. He soon fell into a deep slumber only to be startled to his feet by the celestial vision of a beautiful Lady holding a child in her arms standing before him. She wore modest but spotless garments. Her face was serene and majestic while the child’s face was radiant and glorious. Both the Lady and the child had celestial halos round their heads. Filled with a sense of awe and reverent fear, the shepherd boy was deeply moved, but remained silent. The Lady reassured him with a motherly smile and then asked him for some milk for the child. The request troubled the boy leaving him thinking,

²⁷ Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*.

²⁸ S. R. Santos, *The Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health, Vailankanni* (Thanjavur: Don Bosco Press, 1983).

²⁹ Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 16-18.

“How did she know that I am carrying milk in my pot! How can I dispose of my master’s milk?” He was, however, unable to refuse the gracious Lady. He offered her some of the milk and watched the smile of satisfaction on the infant’s face while thinking that he would explain matters to his master when the time came. Immediately thereafter, the vision disappeared and the boy hurried on to Nagapattinam.

Upon reaching his master’s house, he narrated what had happened, explained the reason for the delay, and pleaded that the master overlook the shortage of milk. When he opened the lid of the milk pot, however, they were astonished to find it filled to the brim with fresh, bubbling milk. The shepherd boy insisted that he had seen the Lady feed her child with a good quantity of the milk from the pot. The master did not chastise the boy, but finding the whole encounter so strange and extraordinary, hastened with young Tamil Krishnannesti to the banks of the pond. There, the boy pointed out to his master the exact spot where the Lady carrying her child appeared to him. In awe, the master prostrated himself on the ground and pressed his forehead to the sacred spot as a sign of reverence. From that day, the pond or tank near Anna Pillai Street was known as *Matha Kulam* or *Ampa Kulam* (Our Lady’s Tank).³⁰ The news of this apparition and miracle rapidly spread throughout the neighborhoods of Vailankanni and Nagapattinam. Christians in Nagapattinam were certain that it must have been the Virgin Mary carrying the Child Jesus. That the Blessed Mother deigned to honor their neighborhood filled them with immense joy. There are reports of countless miracles and cures from drinking the water of

³⁰ Mukherjee, “Locality, History, Memory,” 161. Mukherjee points out that naming this place as Our Lady’s Tank, or *Ampa Kulam*, draws on the idea of *dudhsagar* (sea of milk) in the *Puranas*. She notes that the Krsna motif is stressed as the origin in this story, and the ‘divine’ Lady is not yet named as the Virgin. The cult and shrine are inserted into the Hindu sacred landscape chronologically before the arrival of the Portuguese.

Matha Kulam or by applying it to diseased persons. These miraculous cures continue to this day. A chapel now stands at the spot where the Virgin reportedly appeared to the shepherd boy.³¹

3.1.3.2 *Apparition of Our Lady to a Crippled Buttermilk Vendor*³²

There lived a poor Hindu widow in Vailankanni at the end of the 16th century. She had only one son who was born congenitally lame. To make ends meet, every day the widow put her son in-charge of a buttermilk stall under the shade of a banyan tree that stood on a central mound (*Nadu Thittu*) outside the hamlet. The widow would carry her son and leave him at Nadu Thittu with a pot of buttermilk. The cooling effect of buttermilk and the shade of the banyan tree attracted many customers. One extremely hot day, the young lad expected many passers-by to stop at his stall, but to his disappointment, no one did. While waiting for wayfarers, a Lady of peerless beauty holding a baby appeared before him. They were were clad in white garments. The Lady drew nearer to the crippled boy and asked him for a cup of buttermilk to drink. Proud and joyful that such a distinguished customer should stop by, the boy immediately obliged. With a sense of deep satisfaction, he witnessed the Lady feeding her child the buttermilk. The Lady looked benevolently at the crippled lad and then turning to her child whispered as if entreating him to heal the boy. The lame boy was made whole, but completely entranced by the presence of the Lady and her child, was unaware of his healing.

The Lady acknowledged the young lad's kindness and generosity and then requested him to go to Nagapattinam and apprise a certain wealthy Catholic gentleman of their presence, and of her request to build a chapel in her name at Vailankanni. The Lady's request perplexed and troubled the boy because he knew that his physical impairment would make it impossible to carry out the entrusted mission. He told her so, but she bade him stand up and walk because he

³¹ Santos, *Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health*, 18.

³² Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 19-21.

was no longer a cripple. The boy leaped to his feet with joy upon realizing that he could walk. He sprinted all ten kilometers to Nagapattinam, stopping only to reassure himself that his healing was not his imagination.

When the boy reached the home of the Catholic gentleman, he narrated the details of his vision of the Lady of dazzling beauty holding a heavenly child in her arms. He informed the man that the Lady wanted a chapel built in her honor in Vailankanni. The gentleman had a similar vision of the Lady in a dream the night before bidding him to build a chapel in her name, and so had little reason to doubt the boy. He knew of this lad to be a cripple and could see that he was healed. The two then hastened to Nadu Thittu, the site of the apparition outside Vailankanni.

The Catholic gentleman found tremendous cooperation of the locals who reacted enthusiastically as news of the miraculous healing of the crippled son of the poor widow spread. He erected a thatched chapel at Vailankanni with an altar on which a beautiful statue of Our Lady holding the Infant Jesus in her arms was placed, marking the simple, humble beginning of the shrine at Vailankanni. As news of the chapel spread, Christians and non-Christians streamed into town. So innumerable were the healings and cures of those who prayed at this humble chapel that the Blessed Mother holding her Divine Child came to be incessantly invoked as “Mother of Health, Vailankanni” (*Vailankanni Arrokiya Matha*).

3.1.3.3 *Manifestation of Our Lady Rescues Portuguese Sailors from Shipwreck*³³

In the mid-17th century, an international dimension was added to the Vailankanni cult. A Portuguese merchant vessel was sailing from Macao, China to Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The sailors, approximately 150 of them, started their voyage and were heading west toward the Bay of Bengal when their ship was caught in a turbulent storm. The gale grew

³³ Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 24-25.

furious, the waves lashed high, and the fate of the vessel with all sailors on board seemed sealed. These sailors were good seamen, and ardent Catholics with a devotion to Mary Star of the Sea. With fervor, they instinctively threw themselves on their knees beseeching Mary to succor them, vowing to build a church in her honor, wherever they could land safely on shore. A sign of the Virgin's manifestation immediately occurred. The winds grew still, the waves fell, and the sea became calm. Soon thereafter, the battered ship safely anchored on the shore of Vailankanni.

On landing the shore, the sailors first fell on their knees in gratitude to Jesus and his Blessed Mother. Local fishermen who recognized them as Christians because of how they prayed soon surrounded them. The stranded seamen were led to the thatched chapel that was built by the Catholic gentleman of Nagapattinam. Here again they knelt in gratitude before the image of Our Lady with the Child Jesus in her arms, but for whose miraculous intercession they might have perished. They learned from the fishermen that the village was called Vailankanni, and that the chapel was dedicated to the Mother of Health. All this happened on September 8, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin.

The devoted seamen soon set about to find the best way to fulfil their vow and build a permanent chapel at Vailankanni. A modest brick and mortar chapel 24 feet by 12 feet, with a dome overhead and with windows in the western style, was soon constructed. The statue of Our Lady of the old thatched chapel graced the altar of the new masonry structure. When work on the new chapel was complete, there was great rejoicing that demonstrated the gratitude felt by the Portuguese sailors to the Virgin Mary and her divine Son for the graces showered on them. They dedicated the new chapel to the Nativity of Our Lady to commemorate the day of their landing at Vailankanni. The seamen, however, were far from satisfied with what they had done for the chapel on momentary impulse. On subsequent voyages, they visited Vailankanni and

made improvements to the chapel, most special among them being Chinese porcelain plates depicting biblical scenes inlaid around the high altar of today's Shrine Basilica.

With the landing of the Portuguese ship on the shore of Vailankanni, a new chapter emerged in the history the shrine. The Vailankanni Shrine was initially a part of the parish of Nagapattinam, a seaport under Portuguese control. In 1660, the Dutch captured Nagapattinam and its flourishing trade from the Portuguese. They were hostile to the Catholic Church limiting new developments to the shrine in the hundred years of their rule.

3.1.3.4 Enduring Signs and Symbols

Two symbols that have endured the passage of time are the Shrine Basilica and the patronal festival. The historical narrative of the Shrine Basilica includes all those locations that are sacred to the Vailankanni story. While the annual Vailankanni festival beginning at the end of August is the focus in this subsection, it is worth noting that millions of pilgrims visit Vailankanni throughout the year.

3.1.3.4.1 The Shrine Basilica: Emergence, Growth, and Development

The *Madras District Gazetteer* of 1906 described the Shrine (ca. 1883) as a building that is not particularly impressive externally or internally. What distinguishes the Shrine of Our Lady of Health is the annual draw of pilgrims, not architectural grandeur. The ordinary pilgrim is not only the Indian Catholic, but also a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Parsee, or follower of another faith. To accommodate these pilgrims, the small chapel built by the Portuguese in the 17th century needed expansion. The growth of the shrine premises and pilgrimage to Vailankanni trace back to colonial history, flourishing during Portuguese rule but stagnating under the Dutch who opposed any form of devotion to the Virgin Mary.³⁴ After the Dutch departed, news of the

³⁴ Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 30-32.

miraculous healings at Vailankanni once again spread rapidly. Vailankanni was a part of the parish of Nagapattinam, but with the development of quicker means of transport like paved roads, the railways, and the steamship, more pilgrims began visiting the small chapel. In need of expansion, Vailankanni became an independent parish in 1771 with Franciscans as the caretakers.³⁵ They perpetuated the memory of their presence by installing statues of Francis of Assisi and Anthony of Padua on either side of Arrokiya Matha on the high altar, and these remained there until 1961. The Franciscans administered the shrine until 1889. In 1890, diocesan priests of Mylapore became the custodians. In 1952, the Diocese of Thanjavur was bifurcated from the Diocese of Mylapore through the Papal Bull *Ex Primaevae Ecclesiae*. On March 19, 1953, Rajarethinam Arockiaswamy Sundaram was named first bishop of the new diocese.³⁶

With the growing number of pilgrims, the chapel constructed by the Portuguese was expanded to 70 feet x 22 feet by extending the nave of the Church while preserving the ancient sanctuary and the altar. In 1920, another 20 feet elongated the nave, and two Gothic domes were constructed. In 1933, parish priest Sebastio Noronha oversaw the addition of two new wings to the left and right of the altar, and at right angles to the nave. A spacious vestry added behind the altar gave the sanctuary the shape of the Latin cross. Throughout these developments, the miraculous image remained untouched above the center of the Main Altar.

Bishop Sundaram petitioned John XXIII to raise the ancient shrine to the status of a “minor basilica,” and requested the bestowal of all privileges attached to a basilica on the shrine for the spiritual benefit of the pilgrims. In 1962, when the bishop went to Rome to attend the second session of Vatican II, he reiterated his request. In consultation with the Congregation of

³⁵ Evidence to prove that Vailankanni was raised to the status of independent parish is found in the Bishop’s Register in Mylapore (Archives Page 79). Noted in Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 33.

³⁶ Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 32-38.

Rites, John XXIII exalted the shrine to the status of a Minor Basilica. On November 3, 1962, the Shrine of Vailankanni became the Shrine Basilica of Vailankanni linked to St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome. Translated from Latin, an extract of the Apostolic Brief of John XXIII³⁷ signed by his Secretary of State, Amleto Giovanni reads:

TO PERPETUATE THE MEMORY OF THE EVENT: We learn that at the illustrious Church of Vailankanni within the limits of the Diocese of Tanjore (India) the august Virgin Mary through her powerful intercession imparts to her clients health and is venerated with deep devotion. For, pilgrims in large numbers approach the spot even from distant parts and participate in the sacred services especially during the Novena preceding the Nativity of the Mother of God, so much so that this shrine is not undeservedly hailed as the “Lourdes of the East.” This singular zeal for the Marian veneration has been practiced from fairly ancient times.

In addition to these developments to the Shrine Basilica, commemorative chapels were built at *Matha Kulam* where the Virgin allegedly appeared to the shepherd boy, as well as at *Nadu Thittu*, where she reportedly appeared to the lame buttermilk vendor.³⁸ A Home for the Aged was setup, and a Museum of Offerings housing testimonials of miraculous cures through Mary’s intercession was built.³⁹

3.1.3.4.2 The Vailankanni Festival

Culminating on the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady on September 8, the date on which the Portuguese sailors landed on the shores of Vailankanni, the festival of Arrokiya Matha is celebrated beginning on August 29 each year. During the festival, besides English and Hindi, Masses are celebrated in Tamil, Konkani, Marathi, Malayalam, and Telegu, respectively the state languages of Tamil Nadu, Goa, Maharashtra, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh from where many pilgrims arrive. There are specific times for praying the Rosary and novenas. Two highlights mark each day of the festival—the flag hoisting each morning, and the palanquin procession

³⁷ Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 41-42; Santos, *Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health*, 47-49.

³⁸ Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 68.

³⁹ Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 34-36.

every evening, both of which draw on similar practices at local Hindu temples. Margaret Meibohm's study of the Vailankanni festival reveals a blending of the past and present along several dimensions suggesting that there are alternate means of creating a multifaceted Indian Catholic identity through ritual.⁴⁰

The Flag Hoisting

Every year the festival opens on August 29 with a flag-hoisting ceremony and closes with the lowering of the flag the evening of September 8. Between these bookends, there are nightly processions that reach a climax the night of September 7, and daily hoisting of a different flag bearing the image of the Mother of Health. Before the August 29 ceremony, the flag processes through the streets of Vailankanni followed by an ornately decorated palanquin bearing a statue of Arrokiya Matha. An elder from the Vailankanni Ariya Nattu Chettiyar community⁴¹ directs the ceremonial placement of the flag on a cart and the raising of it over the courtyard wall. In the *mandakapadi*⁴² tradition, the flag hoisting on the first day is performed jointly by members of the Ariya Nattu Chettiyar sister communities of Vailankanni and Nagapattinam who also offer the *upayam* or donation for September 6 and September 7. On the intervening days, male members of the family offering the *upayam* carry a different flag into the church courtyard.⁴³

⁴⁰ Meibohm, "Past Selves and Present Others," 61-63.

⁴¹ Meibohm, "Past Selves and Present Others," 62, 71. The Ariya Nattu Chettiyars are the closest link to the original Hindu seers of the apparitions at Vailankanni. There are two groups—those that live in Vailankanni who though Hindu, retain key ceremonial roles in church celebrations, and take part in the annual festival and other events. Through marriage and caste, they are linked to their sister community in Nagapattinam, and claim traditional rights (*urimai*) in the festival on the premise that Vailankanni once belonged to the parish of Nagapattinam.

⁴² Selva J. Raj, "Public Display, Communal Devotion. Procession at a South Indian Catholic festival," in *South Asian Religions on Display: Religious Processions in South Asia and in the Diaspora*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (New York: Routledge, 2008), 86. The *mandakapadi* tradition, long-held in South Indian Hindu temple festivals, is the practice of leasing ritual honor to select individuals or families who take a sacred image in procession from its principal residence to another site. Pilgrims receive the sacred image in a permanent or semi-permanent structure called the *mandapam* and extend ritual hospitality to it. This is a sought-after honor by pilgrims of all economic standings, but mostly by wealthy patrons for extra spiritual merit and enhanced social prestige.

⁴³ Meibohm, "Past Selves and Present Others," 64. The *upayam* pays for the flowers, lights, and fireworks for the evening procession.

Palanquin Procession of Our Lady

Palanquin processions of Arrokiya Matha through the streets of Vailankanni occur every night from August 30 to September 7. Through September 5, women carry palanquins with the statues of St. Michael the Archangel (symbolizing guardianship) and St. Sebastian (to ward off disease); men carry a larger palanquin with the statue of Arrokiya Matha. On September 6 and 7, additional palanquins for St. Anthony of Padua, St. Joseph, and Our Lady join the procession. A third statue of Mary on a palanquin is carried by Tamil men on one side and men from Mumbai and other parts of India on the other.⁴⁴

Prior to the procession, the same elder from the Ariya Nattu Chettiyar drapes the iconic statue of Our Lady carrying the Child Jesus in an ornate silk sari in the presence of chosen palanquin-bearers and the public waiting to see or join the procession. Arrokiya Matha is crowned and garlanded and a rose garland is placed on her hand. A modern music group, the James Band, plays in front of the church while pilgrims queue up to offer flower garlands to the women waiting to carry the palanquins that are then decorated with these floral donations. Before 8:00 PM, the palanquins of the male saints and that of Our Lady appear in front of the shrine. Pilgrims listen to prayers in Tamil and English and a sermon in Tamil over the loudspeaker. The procession then commences and ends at the beach where fireworks light the sky as pilgrims dash to grab the garlands from the palanquins. The night of September 7 is the grandest with the bishop celebrating Mass and music provided by the James Band, the Velankanni Pilgrims Band, and other brass bands.⁴⁵

This historical background serves as a foundation for the critical study of the local sociocultural and national political influences on the Vailankanni cult in the next section.

⁴⁴ Meibohm, "Past Selves and Present Others," 65-66.

⁴⁵ Meibohm, "Past Selves and Present Others," 66.

3.2 Historical-Critical Analysis of the Vailankanni Cult

The sociocultural and political influences on the religiosity of the Vailankanni landscape have local, national, and international levels of integration. The dynamic of Hindu-Christian relations in southern India help in analyzing the dichotomies of the religious versus the ethnic, and high versus popular religion with respect to the worship of deity through relationships, the Mother-Child image, festival celebrations, pilgrimage and sacrality, religious texts, language, and the transformation of Christian rituals to fit local culture. This analysis together with comparative studies of Hinduism and Christianity lay the groundwork to assert that pluralism extends beyond social and political orientations, and is theological in nature with links to Mary's Assumption and St. Thomas the Apostle. This case also ties in the dogmas of Mary as Mother of God, her perpetual virginity, and the Assumption observed on August 15, the date of India's independence from foreign rule. What makes this case particularly significant is that in the last twenty-five years a rise in Hindu nationalism and religious intolerance towards Muslims and Christians has led to their persecution in many parts of India. Among those affected is the *Dalit* community. The Indian constitution guarantees freedom of religion but are Muslims, Christians and other minorities truly free? Is not the political agenda of the ruling government in conflict with the display of Hindu-Christian unity at Vailankanni? How does Arrokiya Matha bring comfort to the persecuted in their affliction? An analysis of this case will attempt to answer these questions.

3.2.1 Emergence of the Marian Cult

The Marian cult that emerged at Vailankanni displays local, regional, national, and international levels of integration within the realm of maritime trade, the spaces of empire, and the Catholic faith. Peeling these different layers of integration addresses one of the first questions that comes to mind: When was Vailankanni first identified with the Virgin Mary?

The first apparition of the Virgin (ca. mid-16th century) took place before the Portuguese missionaries established their presence in India. Mukherjee affirms that, “the *Krsna* motif is stressed as the origin in this story and the divine lady is not yet identified as the Virgin Mother of Jesus.”⁴⁶ In the second vision (ca. end-16th century), the cult continues to develop with a Catholic dimension because by now the Portuguese had already made inroads into nearby Nagapattinam. In this version, a Christian element gets inserted into the original Hindu motif, but the divine lady is still not identified as the Blessed Mother. These apparitions occur in a rural setting about 6 km from Nagapattinam in an area that could have been either Hindu or subject to Thomist influence. In the final manifestation (ca. mid-17th century), it becomes clear that the handiwork of the Spirit in the rescue of the Portuguese sailors is through the agency of the Virgin Mary who locals called *Arrokiya Matha* or Mother of Health. In this way, the Vailankanni cult gradually became an amalgam of the Hindu, Syrian Christian, and Roman Catholic dimensions over a wide geographical landscape.⁴⁷

Vailankanni’s significance is not confined to Tamil Nadu, but has apostolic, dogmatic, and political prominence for India.⁴⁸ According to St. John Damascene, during the Council of Chalcedon Bishop Juvenal of Jerusalem gave a report on the discovery of Mary’s Assumption. The report stated that after the Transitus of Mary, St. Thomas returned from India to pay respects to the Virgin at her tomb in Gethsemane. When he arrived and asked to see and venerate Mary’s body, the apostles opened her tomb only to find it empty leading them to the supernatural conviction concerning her Assumption.⁴⁹ The historical connection between St.

⁴⁶ Mukherjee, “Locality, History, Memory,” 161.

⁴⁷ Mukherjee, “Locality, History, Memory,” 161-164.

⁴⁸ Varghese, *God-Sent*, 80.

⁴⁹ See John Damascene (P.G., I, 96). *MD* §21-22 refers to St. John Damascene, *Encomium in Dormitionem Dei Genetricis Semperque Virginis Mariae*, Hom. II, n. 14. Also see Varghese, *God-Sent*, 80.

Thomas, the Assumption, and India is not limited to the first century. India, the apostolic home of the saint, gained independence from the British Empire on August 15, 1947, the Feast of the Assumption.⁵⁰ Vailankanni pilgrims view August 15 as a date divinely ordained linking Arrokiya Matha (the Assumption) with Bharat Mata (India's independence). The procession on August 15 depicts the triumph of Arrokiya Matha whose intercession pilgrims believe was instrumental in India's attaining independence.⁵¹ August 15, then signifies India's liberation from foreign rule and Mary's liberation from her temporal earthly existence.

Amidst the kaleidoscope of pilgrims that Vailankanni attracts, Hindus are a conspicuous presence. Of the myriad goddesses to who Hindus also profess their devotion, what is it about Arrokiya Matha that draws them to her and how has this perception altered or modified the ways of Christian worship in rural Tamil Nadu?

3.2.1.1 Kanni Power and Catholic Conceptions of Motherhood

Arrokiya Matha is the 'kanni' of *Velai* in which the notion of virginity is implicit. As the cult developed, Vailankanni identified with the Virgin Mary who Roman Catholics believe was born without the stain of original sin. David Mosse writes, "The Virgin Mary (*mata*) provides a model for death-defeating sexual purity which is the kanni's power. However, given the equally strong identification of Mary with motherhood, the wider Catholic paradoxical ideal of the 'virgin mother' is also reproduced locally."⁵² For Hindus, Arrokiya Matha is simply the new goddess Vailankanni; this necessitates an understanding of Hindu conceptions of the divine goddess, as well as the feminine dimension of the divine in Christianity.

⁵⁰ Varghese, *God-Sent*, 80-81.

⁵¹ Frenz, "The Virgin and Her 'Relations,'" 102.

⁵² David Mosse, "Catholic Saints and the Indian Village Pantheon in Rural Tamil Nadu, India," *Man* 29 (1994): 310. Some scholars may find the notion of Mary's "sexual purity" problematic, but challenging it calls into question the dogmatic truths of her perpetual virginity and Immaculate Conception, as well as the virginal birth of Jesus.

3.2.1.1.1 *Feminine Dimension of Divinity of the Hindu Deity*

Unlike the three monotheistic religions that seem to exclude the feminine as forces of power from their official theologies, Hinduism expresses divine power to be feminine. For Hindus, the unity of god and goddess symbolizes all divine reality. They worship many goddesses, but even a single goddess symbolizes something different in different territories.⁵³

John Carman uses the example of the goddess *Kali* fiercely brandishing a curved sword and wearing a necklace of human skulls. To her, worshippers offer a sacrifice of goats and sometimes a water buffalo. Villagers think of her as one of seven sister goddesses, each dwelling in and protecting a particular village. In northeast India, she is thought to be the great goddess whose power fills the universe with all other goddesses and all beings included within her reality.

Where she is considered *Sakti*, the wife of Lord Siva, she is the dominant partner, and is depicted standing above her husband who is lying prostrate, and “without *Sakti* (the power of the goddess), it is said, Siva is merely *sava* (a corpse).”⁵⁴

Carman infers that Hindu goddesses are conceptualized differently, but always in relationship. First, as a goddess who stands on her own, she bestows all that is good in life on her worshippers, or punishes those who fail to remember her with offerings, or sometimes there is a combination of benevolence and anger. Second, the goddess may be visualized as married to male deities, and may be considered either as the dominant partner like *Kali*, or the loving wife *Parvati* who delights in serving her husband. Even in her self-subordinating role, she is quite capable of acting independently or in conjunction with her husband. Third, she is perceived as a human transformed into a divine being either through violent and untimely death, or in her

⁵³ John B. Carman, “Hindu Goddesses and the Blessed Virgin Mary,” in *Majesty and Meekness: A Comparative Study of Contrast and Harmony in the Concept of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 277-278.

⁵⁴ Carman, “Hindu Goddesses,” 278-279.

quest for love she may marry her divine spouse and disappear from the human realm to live permanently with him.⁵⁵ Therefore, Carman writes, “the Hindu recognition of a feminine dimension of God ... is more inclusive of human experience and less shaped by patriarchal assumptions than the exclusively masculine notion of God in Western monotheism.”⁵⁶

Francis Clooney writes that Hindu goddesses and Mary serve as models for humans to realize their own personhood and even divinization. As Hindus recognize the feminine dimension of God and their religious experience includes the human aspect, they are not likely to prefer Mary who is godlike but not-god to supreme female figures like Sri Devi and Apirami. They are likely to appreciate and honor her as a powerful mother who is central to Catholic devotion even if she is not a goddess because she offers a different way of dealing with suffering, death, and other problems.⁵⁷ In Mary, God became human in Jesus. Christians are to remind themselves that Jesus is God and Mary is not-God. Not the case with Hindus. In some territories, Mary as not-god wields more power than Hindu gods and goddesses.⁵⁸

Clooney also studies a 19th Tamil Indian Christian hymn, *Mataracamman Antati* by M. Appacami Mutaliyar to explore the use of symbols in an interreligious context that presents Mary as mother and queen of Mylapore.⁵⁹ Extrapolating his work to Vailankanni, Clooney would likely draw the same conclusion that Mary’s importance at the Shrine Basilica is rooted entirely in God’s plan manifest in the activity of Christ. On the symbolic level, however, the focus is on Mary, and not Jesus. Clooney conjectures that the poet decided that Mary is the more

⁵⁵ Carman, “Hindu Goddesses,” 283-284.

⁵⁶ Carman, “Hindu Goddesses,” 278.

⁵⁷ Francis X. Clooney, *Divine Mother. Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 230-231.

⁵⁸ Clooney, *Divine Mother. Blessed Mother*, 229.

⁵⁹ Francis X. Clooney, “Mary, Mother of Mylapore: Symbolic Engagement as an Inter-religious Transaction,” in *The Many Faces of Mary*, eds. Diego Irarrazabal, Susan Ross, and Marie-Theres Wacker (London: SCM Press, 2008), 77.

vivid personality in the Indian context, and therefore a better symbol of faith.⁶⁰ The poem taken in its totality however positions Jesus as the foundation for Marian devotion. Clooney writes, “In all of this, Jesus is her son, she is still known as God’s mother... Jesus is a kind of supportive symbol pointing to her. As a result, the mother of Jesus is the one able to grant the desired goal to those taking refuge, at her feet.”⁶¹ He concludes that in the South Indian context, Mary and not Jesus is most fruitfully symbolized confirming that, “effective symbols are not merely the product of correct theological positions” but move ahead quickly, leaving theology behind.⁶²

3.2.1.1.2 *Feminine Dimension of Divinity in Christianity*

Carman writes that the reverence accorded to the Virgin Mary is one key to comparing the Hindu polarity of the masculine/feminine to Western monotheistic thought and practice. The Mary of Scripture is in many respects very different from Hindu goddesses. However, belief in the Virgin Mother at various points in Church history and in different parts of the world is akin in some respects to certain beliefs about Hindu goddesses. In contemporary popular devotion, for instance, Mary acquires some characteristics of old goddesses, especially with her power to bless childless couples with a child. In Catholic Europe, she is venerated by fishermen as *Stella Maris* or ‘Star of the Sea,’ the one who protects their ships and safely guides them back to port.⁶³ The many goddesses of Hinduism are divine manifestations of one divine feminine power (*Sakti*). Marian apparitions as manifestations of the Holy Spirit’s work in Mary represents divine power. Even though they are not a sign of Mary’s power, they represent the oneness of Mary. The appearances of Mary to specific individuals in different parts of the world are distinct

⁶⁰ Clooney, “Mary, Mother of Mylapore,” 80.

⁶¹ Clooney, “Mary, Mother of Mylapore,” 82.

⁶² Clooney, “Mary, Mother of Mylapore,” 85.

⁶³ Carman, “Hindu Goddesses,” 290.

representations of the Virgin, though taking on different cultural aspects and features and accorded different titles.

3.2.2 New Aspects of Worship at Vailankanni

Arrokiya Matha's power has led to new aspects of Vailankanni worship. First, as noted earlier, she is perceived as offering more acceptable ways of dealing with family problems, not just concerns facing village communities. Among the fears of the community that James Ponniah lists are the spread of the smallpox epidemic due to the lack of rain that also has an adverse impact on the harvest season. Life in rural Tamil Nadu and the rest of India is almost entirely dependent on the rhythm of agricultural activities in interior villages. Village folk look ahead to days of prosperity based on the successful completion of the agricultural cycle. As a result, farmers remain constantly vigilant about the efficacy of their farming practices.⁶⁴ Rituals for rain vary from village to village, but praying to the Blessed Mother is the common practice. In this way, the Virgin Mary is spontaneously associated with Mother Earth and praying to her will bring about rain that yields plants and vegetation. Tamil Catholics, especially women, choose open grounds for performing religiocultural functions thereby extending the sacred landscape beyond church premises to include mundane locations of village life.⁶⁵

Second, because of her location on the Coromandel, pilgrimage to Vailankanni includes a new dimension of her worship with foreign symbols, a sign of her limitless range of authority.⁶⁶ Younger writes that Tamilian myth involves fear of the mysterious sea that had encroached on

⁶⁴ James Ponniah, "In Continuity with the Past: Indigenous Environmentalism and Indian Christian Visions of Flora," *Journal of Global Catholicism* 1, Issue 1, no. 2 (2016): 36

⁶⁵ T. Lalitha, *Religion and Society: Indigenisation of Roman Catholicism in South India* (Ph.D. dissertation, University Goa, 2002), 154, in Ponniah, "Indigenous Environmentalism," 38.

⁶⁶ Younger, "Velankanni Calling," 96.

two-thirds of what was once Tamil land.⁶⁷ Fishing and trade conducted by sea was a source of livelihood for a significant number of inhabitants living near the coastline that added mystery to a highly structured system of agriculture and social relations that partially transferred from Europeans with their arrival by sea to India. The Europeans, namely the Portuguese, the Dutch, and later the French, brought unusual goods and ideas to the seacoasts that had an impact on local inhabitants who were mostly fishermen. “When many of the fishermen converted to Christianity, new forms of worship became part of the religious universe and held out the promise of allowing the more adventurous worshippers to gain ritual influence over the once mysterious powers of the sea,”⁶⁸ Younger observes. They believed that if Arrokiya Matha could save shipwrecked sailors from perishing in a violent storm, then the scope of her power is unbounded. That foreign sailors survived a storm through the Blessed Mother’s intercession was over time lost on worshippers; they instead paid attention to the fact that Vailankanni could meet their any need by interceding before God on their behalf.

Third, according to Susan Bayly, in contrast to the Mariamman festival, the Vailankanni pilgrimage takes on a triumphal tone in worship with its organizers calling pilgrims to social action. In this dimension of worship, Arrokiya Matha with a crown on her head is holding an already crowned child giving the image a triumphal character without distracting from the feminine nature of the image.⁶⁹ Festival organizers encourage this triumphalist tone in worship, but Younger observes that present-day worshippers mostly focus on Mary alone, not the child in her arms, and fail to observe the crowns on their heads unless attention is drawn. The triumphal

⁶⁷ Younger, “Velankanni Calling,” 96. Younger notes that in traditional Tamil symbolism the universe spread across five types of terrain: mountains, deserts, forests or pastureland, fertile river valleys, and seacoasts. Though seacoasts are included in the five types, the emphasis is on the types of land environment.

⁶⁸ Younger, “Velankanni Calling,” 96.

⁶⁹ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), in Younger, “Velankanni Calling,” 97.

splendor symbolized by the crowns, the golden adornments, and the happy child add to the peaceful aura, in marked contrast to the anxiety and fear that characterize aspects of the Mariamman festival. Mariamman, a fertility figure who brings rain and crops, is never depicted with a child though sometimes with shadowy male figures.⁷⁰ Incurring her wrath leaves open the potential of barrenness, both of land and of woman. What Vailankanni organizers do not permit, though it covertly happens to some degree, is fortunetelling by women who go into a trance, and attract pilgrims to reveal their fortunes like at the Mariamman festival.⁷¹ Though a very small percentage of pilgrims actually respond, Vailankanni organizers make an appeal late in the festival for concrete action in the world, steering pilgrims to health clinics and social action workshops run by Vailankanni branches or worship centers in their local area.⁷²

3.2.3 Hindu Perceptions of Vailankanni and Other Christian Shrines

Vasudha Narayanan claims that the multitude of Hindus that flock to Vailankanni does not suggest that they frequent all Christian shrines. For instance, Hindus do not attend Sunday Mass at a local church or frequent a neighborhood mosque for *namaz*. They go to particular sacred sites of the “religious other” where there is said to be *power* for Christians, *shakti* for Hindus, and *barakat* for Muslims. They sense this power in the holy place, the narratives of miracles, and the ritual of going on pilgrimage alongside others who share a similar hope. They visit Vailankanni and other holy places to offer petitions or thanksgiving, or simply because it is family tradition. At Vailankanni, the Mother of Health carrying the Child Jesus becomes a

⁷⁰ Brenda E. F. Beck, “The Goddess and the Demon: A Local South Indian Festival and Its Wider Context,” in *Autour de la Déesse Hindoue*, ed. M. Biarreau (Paris: Éditions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1981), in Younger, “Velankanni Calling,” 96.

⁷¹ Younger, “Velankanni Calling,” 96-97. Younger notes the polar character of the Tamil symbol system inclined toward portraying their goddesses as either militant, and independent upholders of the realm of fertility, or co-opted wives and mothers who are supportive of the goals of their husbands and sons.

⁷² Younger, “Velankanni Calling,” 97.

source of power and compassion. Hindus visit sacred places knowing that there is a divine presence, transcendent yet merciful to the needy and powerful enough to help them. The divinity of Arrokiya Matha with Jesus is generic to appear in many places, but also specific because its power can be localized. Hindus recognize this power as being of Mary or the Infant Jesus, but not of Parvati, Durga, or the boy Krishna. It is at Vailankanni that they experience the dictum “one Truth, many paths,” as articulated by many urban Hindu elite.⁷³

For Hindus, Vailankanni becomes another source of power added to their list of right rituals that include bathing in the sea, head tonsuring,⁷⁴ votive offerings, circumambulation of their bodies round the temple, etc. Hindu and Christian priests sometimes encourage and even participate in these rituals that they characterize as “Indian” and “Tamil” forms of popular religion.⁷⁵ This is due in part to the fact that the Church in the post-Vatican II climate, is more tolerant of Hinduism, and has replaced its former attitude of rejection with a positive disposition towards Indian culture, interfaith dialogue, and attempts to inculturate forms of Christian worship.⁷⁶ Yet Christian beliefs and social ethics challenge the non-egalitarian hierarchy of Hindu casteism because it runs counter to gospel values. Despite a conscious incorporation of Indian cultural elements into Christian worship, there is incompatibility between Christian and caste values in indigenous attempts to reconcile sanctity and power, or

⁷³ Narayanan, “Sacred land, common ground, contested territory,” 28.

⁷⁴ Selva J. Raj, “Shared Vows, Shared Space, and Shared Deities: Vow Rituals among Tamil Catholics in South India,” in *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*, eds. Selva J. Raj and William P. Harman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 50. Church-sponsored tonsure houses became popular at Our Lady of Health in Vailankanni and the John de Britto shrine at Oriyur because of the prevalence of this practice. Only church-authorized barbers are licensed to shave heads and many of these barbers (who are Hindus) pay a small commission to the church as a certification fee suggesting that economic rather than religious considerations led to the institutionalization of this ritual practice.

⁷⁵ Narayanan, “Sacred land, common ground, contested territory,” 28.

⁷⁶ Mosse, “Catholic Saints and the Indian Village Pantheon,” 325.

to separate violence and death from life and regeneration in ritual sacrifice. This has led to the rise of Christian movements such as Pentecostalism in rural Tamil Nadu.⁷⁷

3.2.4 Lourdes, Vailankanni, and Guadalupe

Chronologically, the first apparition at Vailankanni reportedly took place about three hundred years before Lourdes. While Vailankanni is called the ‘Lourdes of the East,’ Lourdes has never been referred to as the ‘Vailankanni of the West,’ even though are they both reputed for healing of the sick through Mary’s intercessory power. Approximately, two decades prior to the first vision of Mary by a Hindu shepherd boy in Vailankanni, another well-established apparition to an Aztec farmer named Juan Diego⁷⁸ was reported in Guadalupe, Mexico in 1531.

It is interesting to note that though Lourdes-Vailankanni parallels are often drawn, Vailankanni actually shares more in common with Guadalupe. Both are of indigenous origin (Hindu and Náhuatl, respectively). In both cases, indigenous natives were oppressed by foreign powers, Portugal in the case of Vailankanni, and Spain in the Guadalupe instance. Mary takes on Aztec features (or that of a Palestinian young farmer) at Guadalupe, and is depicted wearing an Indian sari at Vailankanni. In both places she leaves miraculous signs or requests that a chapel be built in her honor—the overflowing milk container (first apparition), the healing of the lame buttermilk vendor (second apparition) and the calming of the sea (third manifestation) at Vailankanni, and an imprint known as the Virgin of Guadalupe on Juan Diego’s *tilma*. Miraculous healing and cures attract millions of pilgrims annually to each site. Attempts to inculturate Christian veneration of Mary as *Vailankanni Arrokiya Matha* and as *La Morenita de*

⁷⁷ David Mosse, “Caste, Christianity and Hinduism: a study of social organization and religion in rural Ramnad” (Thesis, Oxford University, 1986), 495-509, in Mosse, “Catholic Saints and the Indian Village Pantheon,” 326. Pentecostalism in this context refers to the Protestant form, not the revival of Catholic Pentecostalism.

⁷⁸ Though Juan Diego has been declared a saint, the historicity of the apparitions and even his existence is highly contested today.

Guadalupe is explicit. The Vailankanni-Mariamman mythical origin mirrors that of *Guadalupe-Tonantzin*. Finally, in each instance, an encounter with Mary transforms the personhood of the visionary. Krishnannesti Sankaranarayanan of Vailankanni is emboldened to come clean about the missing milk with his master who rushes to *Matha Kulam* convinced of a miracle. Juan Diego of *Guadalupe* is no longer a passive object of someone else's intentions, but a person fully capable of interacting one-on-one with the bishop or another human being.

These similarities draw attention to a vital aspect of christological priority—Mary's affinity for and solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, those deemed insignificant by society, and those persecuted, a subject to which this section turns next.

3.2.5 Religious Persecution in India and Vailankanni's Interreligious Encounter

The Hindu-Christian encounter on display at Vailankanni stands in stark contrast with the current situation of religious persecution against Muslims and Christians in India. The unity witnessed at Vailankanni exemplifies what is possible in plural India, but that image needs to migrate out of shrines, dargahs, and temples on to the streets. The destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya by Hindu nationalists more than a quarter of a century ago led to riots in which more than 2,000 Indians, mostly Muslims died. Since then democracy and religious pluralism have been on trial. Religious persecution has swelled in strongholds of Hindu fundamentalism. The rapid growth of Christianity in India has made the Hindu political mainstream constantly vigilant of Christian mission and evangelization.⁷⁹ Why does the Indian government not want to acknowledge the real and rapid growth of Christianity in India?

⁷⁹ Nagy, *Catholic Shrines*, 3. For decades, the Census of India has consistently enumerated Christians at only 2.3 percent of the Indian population seemingly inconsistent with reality. Nagy notes that the Census is a highly political tool dating back to its inception during British colonialism. The government uses the Census to underestimate the number of Christians living in India. The Anthropological Survey of India from 1984-1993 put the estimated number at 7.3 percent while a 2015 tabulation by the World Christian Database placed the number of Indian Christians at 63,396,832 or 4.8 percent.

Following Robert Frykenberg and Michael Bergunder, Nagy highlights that one of the primary reasons is the rising influence of *Hindutva* ideologies that aim at creating a national Hindu polity to the exclusion of Muslims and Christians owing to the foreign and global character of their respective faiths.⁸⁰ The reality is that Muslims and Christians living in India see themselves as Indian, not foreigners. That these faiths are converting Hindus is a myth. What is baffling is that Hindu fundamentalists conveniently forget the foreign origin of Christianity when they send their children to schools run by Christians and frequent Christian hospitals for medical care.

Hindutva and the Persecution of Minorities

The Indian Church's desire for revitalization stemming from perceived spiritual and community decline has become a political issue due to the minority status of Indian Christians and the desire of some national and regional parties to suppress all forms of Christian growth and evangelization in the face of Hindu nationalism.⁸¹ The goal of a prominent political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had long been to capture power at the center in order to rewrite the history and polity of India's plural society and transform it into a *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu nation) through the forces of Hindu unilateralism or *Hindutva*.⁸² ⁸³ In *Jihad, Hindutva and the Taliban: South Asia at the Crossroads* (2005), Iftikhar Malik claims that in 1992 Hindu fundamentalists, led by the BJP and other political outfits like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal, and Sangh Parivar, seized the most opportune moment to demolish the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. On December 6 that year, Hindu nationalist

⁸⁰ Nagy, *Catholic Shrines*, 3-4.

⁸¹ Nagy, *Catholic Shrines*, 2-3.

⁸² Iftikhar Malik, *Jihad, Hindutva and the Taliban: South Asia at the Crossroads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 84-85.

⁸³ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar beginning in 1923 first popularized *Hindutva*, a form of Hindu nationalism. See *Hindutva: who is a Hindu?* Vinayak D. Savarkar (New Delhi: Bharti Sahitya Sadan, 1989).

groups destroyed the mosque claiming it was built (in 1528-29 (AH 935)) on the site of *Ramjanam Bhoomi* or the birthplace of Lord Ram.

Under the rhetoric of Hindutva, the BJP has emerged victorious in the 1996, 1998, 2014, and 2019 elections. The quiet danger of a Hindu nationalist ideology lurks beneath the mask of development and advancement promised by the BJP. The mounting persecution of minorities (particularly Muslims and Christians) that follows BJP electoral victories has left many communities living in fear. According to a study by the Evangelical Fellowship of India, the state of Tamil Nadu recorded the highest incidents of anti-Christian violence during 2017, documenting at least 351 cases.⁸⁴ There are numerous reports of Hindutva-incited militancy against Dalit⁸⁵ Muslims and Christians. They are denied access to land, are forced to work in degrading conditions, and are abused at the hands of police and higher castes that enjoy state protection. A number of Indian states remain socially stratified with Dalits completely segregated. As a mechanism for their own self-defense, many Dalits do not identify themselves as Muslim or Christian for fear of attacks and so that they can keep the privileges they enjoy.⁸⁶ Today, persecution extends to whole Muslim and Christian communities, not just Dalits.

⁸⁴ "Tamil Nadu Tops in Hate Crimes against Christians," *Matters India*, February 17, 2018, <http://mattersindia.com/2018/02/tamil-nadu-tops-in-hate-crimes-against-christians/> (accessed March 26, 2018).

⁸⁵ C. B. John Webster, "Who is a Dalit?" in *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, ed. S.M. Michael (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1999), 68, in "The Human Rights Implications of Dalit Self-Assertion in India," Jagannatham Begari. Cited in Mukherjee, *Locality, History, Memory*, 264. The term 'Dalit' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'dal' meaning burst, split, broken or torn asunder, down-trodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed. The British were the first to use the word, followed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in a Marathi speech.

⁸⁶ Thomas Pulloppillil, *Church, Private Property and the Scheduled Castes* (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1998), 2-3. Dalits comprise 16% of India's population. The backwardness of Dalits extends to almost all areas of social life, but economic backwardness is most debilitating. When the Constitution of India was formulated, the founding fathers incorporated various economic measures with special consideration for Dalits to uplift their economic condition along with reserved quotas for them in matters of education and employment. Seats were reserved for Dalits in Parliament and state legislatures and this was later extended to local governing bodies as well.

3.3 Assessment: Implications of Vailankanni for Ecclesial Life

Vailankanni is an example where pilgrimage offers the opportunity to break out of the order of organized religion and to delve into the chaos that characterizes the festival. Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and followers of other faiths praying together asserts that pluralism extends beyond social and political orientations, providing a context for freeing oneself of constricting social roles to encounter the religious other so that redemptive possibilities may be glimpsed or experienced. Vailankanni's 16th and 17th century apparitions and manifestation underpin two key aspects of evangelization—inculturation and interreligious dialogue—and how their intersection with mission and Hindu ideology have both borne fruit as well as run counter to work of the Spirit.

3.3.1 Evangelizing Work of the Holy Spirit through Mary

Over the centuries, the Marian shrine at Vailankanni became a source of healing for millions of pilgrims. Three central spots during a pilgrimage in Vailankanni are *Matha Kulam*, *Nadu Thittu*, and the Shrine Basilica. Varghese writes that it is at Vailankanni that Mary evangelizes in a special manner through signs, miracles and wonders.⁸⁷ Anto Akkara, correspondent for the National Catholic Register, reported that the most recent “visible” sign of her miraculous wonder occurred on December 26, 2004 when the Diocese of Thanjavur was among those areas hit hard by the magnitude-9 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Church officials at Vailankanni reported a miracle at the Shrine Basilica. “The killer waves surged and came up to the entrance of the main basilica where the statue of Our Lady of Vailankanni is present and receded after touching the first steps of the basilica’s outer door,” even though the bus stand a quarter mile behind the shrine, but on the same elevation, was inundated with water. “The Holy

⁸⁷ Varghese, *God-Sent*, 80.

Mother has worked wonders despite the tragedy here,” said Joseph Lionel, Thanjavur diocesan chancellor coordinating relief work at the basilica.⁸⁸

It is to Vailankanni that pilgrims throng from all parts of India, neighboring countries and around the world throughout the year and in the hundreds of thousands during the ten-day festival in the run up to September 8, the nativity of Mary. Santos writes, “On entering the Basilica they prostrate themselves with child-like abandon before the miraculous image of the merciful Mother and pray with arms outstretched. ...They pray for themselves and their dear ones, for peace in the family, for prosperity and health, and make vows for their spiritual and physical welfare and for graces and favors. ...They render thanks to their Mother for sicknesses cured, dangers and calamities averted, worries banished, and offer her tokens of gratitude and love.”⁸⁹ Varghese reflects that it is the power of the Holy Spirit that descends upon them through Mary’s intercession, a power acting within them even without their knowledge, giving them the will to relinquish evil from their lives and drawing them to interior conversion by accepting the ways of Christ. These experiences are not only for Catholics, but also for Hindus, Muslims, and all who come to her.⁹⁰

3.3.2 Effective Evangelization in Multicultural and Religiously Plural Contexts

According to Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, John Paul II laid out four criteria for effective evangelization, the third directed toward the evangelization of cultures. To this end, the Pope established the Pontifical Council for Culture in 1982 to make cultures harmonious with Christian values and open to the gospel message allowing it to penetrate social and cultural

⁸⁸ Anto Ankarra, “Miracles and Horrors: Tsunami spares Church; Catholics aid victims,” *National Catholic Register*, January 15, 2005, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CHISTORY/TSUNININDI.HTM> (accessed March 19, 2018).

⁸⁹ Santos, *Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health*, 56-57. Santos includes numerous testimonials of thanksgiving from pilgrims across India in the second half of his book (pp. 58-120). Also see Gabriel et al., *History of the Shrine Basilica*, 83-105.

⁹⁰ Varghese, *God-Sent*, 80.

reality.⁹¹ His predecessor, Paul VI, exhorted that “individual Churches have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand ... in the sense which one may call anthropological or cultural.”⁹² At the local and regional levels of integration within the Vailankanni cult, the popes’ exhortations call the particular church to evangelize via interreligious dialogue that necessarily addresses inculturation.

Bidirectional Inculturation at Vailankanni

The inculturation of ritual praxis at Vailankanni is a unique, bidirectional process. Some rituals that offer insight into Hindu-Catholic and Catholic-Hindu inculturation include votive practices and festival processions. However, it is possible that Christian practices did not always need to adapt to fit local culture; Christian missionaries may have brought some of these customs to India and Hindu tradition may have appropriated them.

a. Votive Practices in Rural Tamil Nadu

All castes and economic classes of Hindus visit the Shrine Basilica and other Vailankanni shrines in Nagapattinam and Chennai. At these sites, they light candles, say prayers, tonsure their heads as acts of piety, or offer silver models of various parts and organs of the body. This practice is common in Hindu temples, Muslim dargahs, and Catholic shrines in south India. A person suffering from some ailment purchases from a local vendor or an institutionally authorized shop, a small flat piece of silver with an etching of that body part (called *pratima* in

⁹¹ Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, *John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring the Good News to Others*. (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006), 6-9. Also, see John Paul II, Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris missio* (7 December 1990), §51-54, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html.

⁹² Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), §53, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html.

Sanskrit, or *malar* in Tamil) and places it in the offering box as they make their way through the temple, dargah, or shrine. Someone with several ailments may buy a silver piece with an etching of the entire male or female body, and offer it to the Healing Mother, or another deity. They return to make a similar offering when cured. These offerings are not limited to healing or cure of illnesses. People also offer etchings of houses, cars, and motor bikes if they want to purchase one of these. Students and authors buy carvings of pens and books for success in examinations, and book publication and sales, respectively. In the Vailankanni basilica and the Nagore dargah which are located on the seashore, fishermen offer etchings of fishing boats. Some variations are observed at Vailankanni. Initially, pilgrims may offer wax models of body parts, and when cured, return with silver etchings.⁹³ Another ritual common at Vailankanni is a variation of the cradle rite practiced elsewhere. Women praying for a child tie cradles to the shrine tree and promise to offer a silver cradle to Arrokiya Matha when a child is born.

The votive ritual includes other practices common to both Hindus and Christians.⁹⁴ Vailankanni's coastal location makes it possible for pilgrims to bathe in the sea, a practice carried out by Hindus on certain days of the ritual calendar. Others shave their heads or roll their bodies around the temple (*anga pradakshinam*), something now also practiced at Vailankanni. Narayanan explains that Christians also participate in some of these Hindu forms of worship, but attach their significance to something else like wearing of sari or applying the *tikha* or mark on the forehead. Hindus bring to Vailankanni their customs, but also participate in Catholic rituals like the Stations of the Cross if told it will deliver them from their present predicament. Narayanan describes these as "Christian apparition, Hindu forms of piety;

⁹³ Narayanan, "Sacred land, common ground, contested territory," 24.

⁹⁴ Narayanan, "Sacred land, common ground, contested territory," 24-25.

Christian vision, Hindu frames; Christian ground, Hindu rituals.”⁹⁵ Though the boundaries between Hindu and Christian ritual practice in these shared, negotiated spaces are permeable, they do exist. Hindus cling to their identity and know how different they are from Muslims and Christians. They know whom to marry, whom to eat with, and with whom to worship, but they also adopt customs from others or export their own into the worship of powerful deities like Muslim saints, and some images of the Blessed Virgin like Vailankanni Arrokiya Matha.⁹⁶

b. Festival Processions

Roman Catholic processions assume different forms in different parts of India but share certain basic features that attract followers of other creeds. Frenz identifies five characteristics of Catholic festival processions which when compared with Hindu temple processions in southern India bear striking similarities with respect to claims to public space, handling of sacred objects, directional movement, processional sequence, and timing.⁹⁷ Despite the structural and functional similarities that attract adherents of other faiths, Catholics do not simply model their processions after those of Hindus. Frenz observes that Catholic processions in India are a creative conjunction of Roman Catholic processions in Europe, and that Hindu tradition adopted these practices from Christian missionaries.⁹⁸ What is common between Catholic and Hindu processions is one substrata for dialogue, but it does not blur the difference. For Catholics, it does matter that it is Mary, and not Mariamman or Parvati, sitting atop the palanquin dressed in a golden and white sari.⁹⁹ Joanne Waghorne writes, “The common idiom provides a basis for mutual exchange and competitive negotiation between Hindus and

⁹⁵ Narayanan, “Sacred land, common ground, contested territory,” 25.

⁹⁶ Narayanan, “Religious Vows at the Shrine of Shahul Hamid,” 80.

⁹⁷ Frenz, “Virgin and Her ‘Relations,’” 93-94.

⁹⁸ Frenz, “Virgin and Her ‘Relations,’” 94.

⁹⁹ Joanne P. Waghorne, “Chariots of the Gods: Riding the Line between Hindu and Christian,” in Raj and Dempsey, *Popular Christianity in India*, 16. Cited in Frenz, “Virgin and Her ‘Relations,’” 94.

Christians.”¹⁰⁰ Hindus frequently participate in Catholic processions though to a lesser degree is the reverse true due to discouragement by Catholic prelates. In some holy places, ritual participation is one-sided; while Hindus openly participate in cults to Catholic saints, Catholic involvement in cults to Hindu deities is often covert with offerings made through Hindu proxies.¹⁰¹ Today, Christians freely frequent Hindu holy places like Varanasi in contrast to a few decades ago when clergy preached that visiting Hindu temples or participating in Hindu religious processions were incompatible with Christian faith.¹⁰²

Interreligious Encounter

Over the past few decades, the Indian Church has experimented with different initiatives of interreligious dialogue that seem contrived at best. These models adopted a top-down approach under the scrutiny of the clerical hierarchy. An authentic approach to addressing this concern is what Selva Raj describes as “dialogue on the ground” occurring between Hindus and Catholics in the area of popular piety and ritual at the grassroots level that is often in opposition to institutional norms and directives.¹⁰³ Following Victor Turner’s structure-antistructure paradigm, Raj argues that the ongoing well-being of society and culture requires delving into the chaos and disorder one traditionally experiences in pilgrimage rituals and religious festivals. For Turner, this provides a context for breaking out of constricting social roles as well as mixing up social relations, so that other redemptive possibilities may be experienced.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Frenz, “Virgin and Her ‘Relations,’” 94.

¹⁰¹ Mosse, “Catholic Saints and the Indian Village,” 307.

¹⁰² Antony Kalliath, “The Christian Pilgrimage towards a Credible Interfaith Fellowship,” *Exchange* 32, no. 1 (January 2003): 10.

¹⁰³ Selva J. Raj, “Dialogue ‘On the Ground’: The Complicated Identities and the Complex Negotiations of Catholics and Hindus in South India,” *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 17 (2004): 33.

¹⁰⁴ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Jersey: Aldine Transaction, 1974), 231-270; David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 207. Cited in Raj, “Dialogue ‘On the Ground,’” 39.

Turner writes that grassroots dialogue offers four valuable insights for interreligious encounter between Hindus and Catholics.¹⁰⁵ It primarily occurs among the religious folk on the margins of society organically emerging from their lived human and spiritual concerns, and those of their neighbors with whom they engage in daily dialogical relationship. Pre-established and forced institutional experiments do not work for them. Through daily interactions, they draw from each other's ritual and religious resources and their shared culture and language. Second, they understand as efficacious and productive, the world of rituals not the world of theological concepts and categories. Raj argues that "although the institutional model recognizes the efficacy and dialogical value of ritual, it has only limited success and appeal because of its inherent elitism, and more importantly, because of the church's aggressive missionary approach in the past and, in some instances, even today." Institutional dialogue appears divorced from the experiences and concerns of the dialogical and religious partners; it relies heavily on Brahminic and Sanskritic Hinduism whereas dialogue on the ground draws from lay Hinduism. The ritual exchange between lay Hindus and Catholics "effects a certain organic transformation in the participants' perception of the 'religious other' that transcends temporal, spatial, ritual, and religious boundaries." This means that direct entry into the ritual praxis of their partner in dialogue enriches the encounter and understanding of the other. Third, 'dialogue on the ground' is dialogue in action emerging from its religiously plural context. It is not a rejection of institutional models, but serves as a corrective and complement to the concept-laden institutional dialogue that appears removed from the existential concerns of common folk, and is often one-sided. Its loci are textual, metaphysical, theological, and mystical tradition whereas grassroots dialogue focuses on lay praxis and ritual. Finally, dialogue on the ground challenges a

¹⁰⁵ Raj, "Dialogue 'On the Ground,'" 42-43.

rigid understanding of authenticity, purity, and identity by discouraging the tendency to draw absolute contrasts between coexisting groups and ideologies.¹⁰⁶ These insights call for a shift in approach from top-down institutional dialogical experiments to bottom-up grassroots, from traditional emphasis on sacred text and theological reflection to lived praxis.

Reflecting on religious demographics, Francis Clooney argues that despite the ongoing spate of persecutions against religious minorities in plural India, a Hindu *Bharat* is an unrealistic vision of political propagandists. The presence of other traditions in India are clearly not going to fade away, and any change in demographics will prompt and necessitate a new and unending conversation between Hindu and non-Hindu neighbors.¹⁰⁷ With the migration of Hindus and Christians from India to the West, Europeans and North Americans find that the types of Christianity that have thrived in the Global South are vastly different from what they consider mainstream. These models of Christianity are far more enthusiastic and concerned with the immediate workings of the supernatural, through prophecy, visions, ecstatic utterances, and healing. If the majority of Christians are now living in Asia, Africa, or Latin America, then religious practices dominant in those regions will soon become more common across the globe as these patterns get transplanted into the religious milieu of the core nations of world Christianity, either by migration or actual missions.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Corrine G. Dempsey, *Kerala Christian Sainthood: Collisions of Culture and Worldview in South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4, in Raj, "Dialogue 'On the Ground,'" 43.

¹⁰⁷ Francis X. Clooney, "How the Numbers Matter: Demographics and the Future of Hindu-Christian Dialogue," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 17, no. 6 (2004): 18. In this article, Clooney reflects on *Religious Demography*, A. P. Joshi., M. D. Srinivas, and J. K. Bajaj (Chennai: Center for Policy Studies, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ A. P. Joshi, M. D. Srinivas, and J. K. Bajaj, *Religious Demography* (Chennai: Center for Policy Studies, 2003), 107-108, in Clooney, "How the Numbers Matter," 16-17.

3.3.3 Arrokiya Matha, the Search for Liberation, and the Role of the Indian Church

As described earlier festival organizers call people to social action to help the poor, but not many respond. An issue with Marian devotion in shrines like Vailankanni is the tendency to spiritualize poverty and accept misery as punishment for unfaithfulness. Therefore, the search for liberation must not only move to the streets of Tamil Nadu but Dalits and other suffering constituents need to be freed from such a transactional understanding of faith.

Initially the Protestant Church in South India, through a body of literature, drew attention to the plight of Dalit Muslims and Christians. The Church and the Indian government should collaborate to liberate these communities from the margins of society. It is worth reminding oneself that the Indian Catholic Church is herself of indigenous origin and to remain true to her nature, as Kurien Kunnumpuram affirms, she must incarnate herself in the cultures of peoples among whom she exists.¹⁰⁹

Sathianathan Clarke states that in a holistic sense, liberation for Dalits includes finding their identity through direct encounter with their religion and culture.¹¹⁰ This encounter may involve a conscious rejection of Dalit religion, but it is still important to utilize traditional Dalit representations of the community's knowledge of God found in the pain and pathos from centuries of oppression and marginalization. This pain and pathos that has shaped the community's religion and culture can become a site for locating knowledge of the divine. In a certain sense, there is a symbolic correlation between Dalit historical consciousness and the

¹⁰⁹ Kurien Kunnumpuram, *The Indian Church of the Future* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2007), 40. Kunnumpuram writes that it is not enough for an Indian church of the future to be a church of the poor. She must become a poor church because even though the vast majority of Catholics in India are poor, the Indian Church owing to her links with Rome gives the impression of being a rich church (29). Vatican II teaches that the Church must follow Jesus' example by giving up reliance on material wealth for the furtherance of her mission. In India, 'opted poverty' is a sign of true religiosity (30).

¹¹⁰ Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 46.

dalitness of Jesus Christ.¹¹¹ Those in authority, threatened by Jesus' preaching and praxis, sought to alienate him. Similarly, Dalits and other indigenous scheduled tribes in India embody alienization by those in power as well as ordinary Indian citizens. The Indian Church herself being of indigenous origin does take a lead role in uplifting these oppressed groups from their conditions of material poverty and spiritual despair. However, the Church cannot do it alone and requires local governments to be co-partners. From an ecclesial perspective, one way for the church to disassociate this stigma is to inculturate indigenous practices into different forms of Christian worship as an expression of liberation. For Aloysius Pieris, inculturation is not a process that exists apart from the struggle for liberation. In his view, Christian churches have remained *in* Asia, but have not become *of* Asia, because they fail to unite non-Christian religiousness and material poverty. The only way that an Indian (or Asian) way of being church can evolve is to appropriate some of the spirituality of non-Christian religions, and to account for the impoverished conditions of the masses.¹¹²

From a cultural viewpoint, Dalit theology is one of several forms of indigenous Christian theologies expressed through music, a phenomenon of religious expression that existed in Tamil Nadu since their first contact with Portuguese missionaries around 1535. Dalit Christian music attempts to address the oppression that consumes the lives of Christian and non-Christian Dalits in villages where they are discriminated against in the mundane activities of daily life. In his composition entitled *Samiya Vananguradu*, Theophilus Appavoo outlines his theology of the universal family, characterizing God as a bi-gendered parent, and Jesus as the elder brother and son of Mary. He describes the Holy Spirit as teacher of solidarity. Referring to the Virgin Mary

¹¹¹ Arvind P. Nirmal, "Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology* (Madras: Gurukul, 1992), 141. Cited in Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, 46.

¹¹² Peter C. Phan, "Jesus the Christ with an Asian Face," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 406-407.

as *Kannimari*, and reflecting his feminist standpoint, Appavoo describes her as the independent bearer of salvation because she conceived Jesus without the help of a man. There would be no salvation without Mary's help and her willingness to risk social alienation as an unmarried pregnant woman. He uses rural symbols to invite Christian Dalits to return to the life force of the land, to wash off classism and internalized casteism, and to reclaim the auspiciousness of rural Dalit culture and identity as clean, subverting the Brahmanic hegemony.¹¹³

3.3.4 Arrokiya Matha's Synergy with the Spirit and the Question of Official Recognition

The Virgin Mary as Arrokiya Matha is clearly a focus of unity at Vailankanni. In synergy with the Holy Spirit, she brings about religious and multicultural harmony at local, regional, national, and international levels. Though not officially recognized by The Holy See, approval of Vailankanni is implicit in the exaltation of the Shrine to the status of 'minor basilica' in 1962. Given the pilgrim statistics of approximately 20 million annually, perhaps Vatican sanction is irrelevant, but doing so would put on display for the world church the authenticity of popular piety by Vailankanni's non-Christian practitioners at a time when the Catholic Church has witnessed unprecedented growth in the Global South. Perhaps the issue of contention is the recognition of the Church or the Pope by these followers of Vailankanni, but by appearing to impoverished Hindu boys the Blessed Virgin sends the message that to who she appears is not conditional on their being Catholic. So, rather than Lourdes attempting to liken herself to Vailankanni chronologically-speaking, the latter has taken on a Lourdes-style architectural appearance of her basilica to favor "the one European based apparition of St. Mary that shares a key spiritual asset with Our Lady of Vailankanni, namely a reputation for divine healing."¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Zoe C. Sherinan, "Dalit Theology in Tamil Christian Folk Music: A Transformative Liturgy by James Theophilus Appavoo," in Raj and Dempsey, *Popular Christianity in India*, 243-245.

¹¹⁴ Nagy, *Catholic Shrines*, 187-188.

In this chapter, the apparitions of Vailankanni have presented an opportunity to expose and critically examine the historical, sociocultural, and political influences on changing Hindu-Catholic relations. An assessment of ongoing persecution against religious minorities—Christians and Muslims—and the marginalization of Dalits within these communities of faith, awakens an uprising or liberation from oppression. A look at the Holy Spirit’s action through the person of *Arrokiya Matha* has implications for the theological concerns of Church, namely the evangelization of cultures, for which transformative inculturation and authentic dialogue in religiously plural India, are essential and necessary enablers. Chapter 4 looks at another religiously plural setting that offers the opportunity to expose and examine the dynamic of Muslim-Christian relations and their implications for ecclesial life through the manifestations of Our Lady in the Cairo suburb of Zeitoun in Egypt.

CHAPTER 4

Al-Adhra' al-Zaytun, Umm al-Noor The Virgin of Zeitoun, Mother of Light

*Unique in the history of Marian apparitions, unique in the circumstances of time and place, unique in the almost complete silence of the American Press, religious and secular, are the apparitions in Zeitoun (Cairo), Egypt, in 1968 and 1969...*¹

—Jerome Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt* (1969)

Our Lady Returns to Egypt, written while the apparitions and manifestations at Zeitoun were still ongoing, gives particular importance to the fact that the majority of seers were Muslims who readily embraced the identification of the supernatural figure as that of the Virgin (*al adhra'*). Such receptivity is not surprising given the exalted place Maryam holds in the Sunni and Shia traditions of Islam. The serial apparitions at Zeitoun are a unique case in that they are an exception to one pattern associated with Marian apparitions—that they are “most likely to occur where the prevailing religious world view legitimizes a belief in Mary’s role as a powerful supernatural intercessor.”² Coptic Christians do not pray to the Virgin Mary, but ask her to pray on their behalf. Islam does not assign to Maryam a role that is intercessory or mediatory, as does the Roman Catholic Church.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section includes an understanding of Egyptian Coptic Christians as a historically marginalized people, and the differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Catholic Church in their christological and mariological teachings. The next part of this section describes the transfigurations of the Virgin, characteristics of her appearances, supernatural phenomena accompanying the apparitions, the

¹ Jerome Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt* (San Bernardino: Culligan Book Company, 1969), 1.

² Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 211, 214. There is nothing in Islamic theology that affirms that the Virgin Mary has intercessory powers with God, or that prayers directed at her are particularly efficacious. However, the fact that the Holy Qur’an has an entire *surah* dedicated to Mary lays the theological foundation that she was chosen and exalted by God above all women to be a divine messenger.

authentication process, official confirmations, and reports of miraculous cures and healings. The second section of this chapter is a historical-critical analysis of the Zeitoun phenomenon that gathers evidence for responding to why the Virgin appeared in Egypt, and why at Zeitoun. Important to this analysis, particularly in the context of examining Muslim-Christian relations in the Near East are two aspects: an interpretation of the other phenomena accompanying the apparitions, and an interpretation of the silence of the Virgin at Zeitoun and its identification with her silence at Knock. The final section of this chapter is an assessment of the implications of Zeitoun for ecclesial life of the local church.

4.0.1 The Copts—A Protected or Persecuted Minority?

The Copts are the native Christians of Egypt.³ They comprised the majority of Egyptians when the Arabs invaded the country in 642 C.E. under the leadership of ‘Amr ibn al-‘As, but by the end of the tenth century, Islam became the predominant religion.⁴ Earlier scholarship through the 1980s suggested that the Copts, owing to their doctrinal differences with the rest of the Byzantine Church, welcomed the Arabs as liberators and seemingly enjoyed comparable social and economic status with Muslims. However, recent scholarship contends that during the patriarchate of Coptic Pope Isaac (fl. 686-689), Copts witnessed the destruction of crosses ordered by the Muslim governor of Egypt. By asserting Islamic creed, Muslims challenged Christian notions of the Trinity, and Jesus’ divinity.⁵ Polemical statements against the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity were scribbled on church doors, leaving untenable the

³ Youssef G. Kamell, John P. Jackson, and Rebecca S. Jackson, *A Lady of Light Appears in Egypt: The Story of Zeitoun* (Colorado Springs: St. Mark’s Avenue Press, 1996), 11. (The three authors have individually written a section of this book). In biblical times, Egypt was known by the Semitic name Mizraim (Gen 10:6), or “Mistr” in Arabic. Its Greek name, “Aigyptos” is from the old Egyptian word *Ha-Ka-Ptah*, from which the word “Copt” likely gets its derivation.

⁴ Peter E. Makari, “Christianity and Islam in Twentieth-Century Egypt: Conflict and Cooperation,” *International Review of Mission* 89, no. 352 (January 2000): 89, in “Lessons from Zeitoun: A Marian Proposal for Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” Maura Hearden, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 410-411.

⁵ Heather J. Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 37.

theory that the Copts wholeheartedly received Arab invaders as their liberators.⁶ However, if forced to make a choice between the Arabs and the Romans contending for their homeland, the Copts opted for the protection of the Arabs and signed a treaty of their acceptance.⁷ Arab polemics against Christian doctrine notwithstanding, the Copts for a long period did well under Muslim rule.

During the first half of the 20th century, an attitude of cooperation and unity helped Copts integrate into Egyptian society.⁸ The emergence of leftist political parties like the *Wafd* party supported Coptic Christians who in return supported secular Egyptian and Arab nationalism. As *dhimmi*⁹ (non-Muslims enjoying protected status within Muslim territories), they held most of the administrative posts particularly in the tax and accounting system. Even though ordinary Copts supported leftist parties, especially those that provided equality to minorities and where Islam was not the central identity, the hostile attitude of the Coptic Orthodox Church towards these parties reduced their participation in the political realm and the economic sphere.¹⁰ While they enjoyed full powers and achieved huge gains, there were petitions by Muslims to remove Christians from these posts. One of the caliphs prohibited

⁶ Harold Suermann, "Copts and the Islam of the Seventh Century," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations Vol. 5), eds. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas (Boston: Brill, 2006), 109. Also see *Christians in Muslim Egypt: An Historical Study of the Relations between Copts and Muslims from 640 to 1922*, Jacques Tagher, trans. Ragai N. Makar (Altenberge, Germany: Oros Verlag, 1998), 28-29, in Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun," 411.

⁷ Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt*, 33-35, in Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun," 411.

⁸ David Zeidan, "The Copts—Equal, Protected, or Persecuted? The Impact of Islamization on Muslim-Christian Relations in Modern Egypt," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10 (March 1999): 56.

⁹ *Dhimmi* is linked to concepts of humiliation and subjugation with limitations on the public expression of minority religions, the illegitimacy of proselytization, and inappropriateness of minorities like Copts to compete with Muslims in economic areas (see Zeidan, "The Copts," 61).

¹⁰ B. L. Carter, *The Copts in Egyptian Politics, 1918-1952* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 110-111, 290, in Zeidan, "The Copts," 56-57.

Christians from riding horses, and ordered images of devils, pigs, and monkeys painted on the doors of Christian homes. Muslims perceived Copts as allies of Islam's Byzantine enemies.¹¹

Copts appear to possess multiple identities—Egyptian, Arab, Coptic, Christian, prioritizing each identity according to changing circumstances. They view themselves as authentic Egyptians as well as Arabs sharing a common history and culture with Egyptian Muslims.¹² They view their history as one characterized by discrimination, marginalization, persecutions, massacres, and forced conversions. They are a subjugated people facing a constant existential threat while surviving within a dominant Islamic majority.¹³ Different sources provide different estimates of their membership largely influenced by religious or political motives, a point taken up in section three.

The Copts appear caught in a political impasse because the very leaders who established policies that granted them equal rights were the ones who indirectly marginalized them. For example, when President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-1970) introduced land reform and nationalization programs, it led to a decline in Coptic participation in politics and economics. At the same time, Nasser protected them from the pan-Islamic Muslim Brotherhood, and permitted the building of 25 churches a year, including the Cathedral of St. Mark.¹⁴ After Nasser's death, President Anwar Sadat (1970-1981) created an atmosphere that was hostile to Copts by suspecting them of collaborating with Egypt's enemies, and projecting himself as an ardent defender of Islam to divert attention from his failures. He attacked the Coptic Church in

¹¹ Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt*, 82-87, in Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun," 411-412.

¹² R. Tapper, ed., *Some Minorities in the Middle East*, Occasional Papers 9 (London: CNMES/SOAS, 1992), 13-14, in Zeidan, "The Copts," 56.

¹³ Y. Masriya, "A Christian community: the Copts in Egypt," in *Case Studies on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: a world survey*, Vol. 4, eds. Veenhoven et al. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1976), 60, 84, in Zeidan, "The Copts," 56.

¹⁴ M. Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: the assassination of Sadat* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 157-58, in Zeidan, "The Copts," 57.

his speeches causing divisions that intensified intercommunal violence.¹⁵ Following Sadat's assassination, when Hosni Mubarak came to power, he compromised with Islamic moderates to stem Islamic fundamentalism. When government officials and tourists were attacked, his regime cracked down on Islamic extremists, but ignored similar attacks on Copts.¹⁶

From the middle of the twentieth century through today, the plight of the Copts only worsens. Today, their grievances have to do with the lack of permits to build new churches, confiscation of Coptic *waqf* lands for Islamic purposes, forced conversions, imposition of Shari'a law on non-Muslims, disadvantages in personal law, education, the job market, and appointments to government and public service positions.¹⁷

4.0.2 Key Aspects of Coptic Christianity and the Coptic Orthodox Church

Coptic Christians adhere to the christological formula of St. Cyril of Alexandria: μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη (*Mia physis tou Theou Logou sesarkōmenē*)¹⁸ or “one nature of the Word of God incarnate.” Coptic christology teaches that in Christ there is only one nature. There is no transmutation or comingling of human and divine natures.¹⁹ A misunderstanding of Coptic doctrine led to the alienation of the Coptic Orthodox Church from the rest of the Byzantine Church. Bishop Athanasius of Beni Soueff and Bahnasa wrote: “From the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Coptic Church—like all its sister Orthodox Churches—has been wrongly regarded by the West as Eutycheans (Monophysites) or Docetists, whereas they have always

¹⁵ N. R. Farah, *Religious Strife in Egypt: Crisis and Ideological Conflict in the Seventies* (Montreux: Gordon and Breach, 1986), 18, in Zeidan, “The Copts,” 57.

¹⁶ P. D. Gaffney, “Authority and the Mosque in Upper Egypt: the Islamic preacher as Image and Actor,” in *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning*, ed. W. R. Roff (London: Croom Helm, 1987), in Zeidan, “The Copts,” 57.

¹⁷ M. Faour, *The Arab World after Desert Storm* (Washington: USIP, 1993), 65, in Zeidan, “The Copts,” 57.

¹⁸ Otto F. A. Meinardus, “Coptic Orthodox Inculturation in the West,” *Coptic Church Review* 18, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 73.

¹⁹ Konrad Algermissen, *Christian Denominations* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1945), 706, in Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 5.

believed in God Incarnate with his divinity and humanity united without mixture, confusion, or change.”²⁰

The “*mia physis*” formula²¹ was not the only theological issue separating the Coptic Church from the Latin Church. They do not accept more recent developments such the supremacy and infallibility of the Roman pontiff in matters of faith and morals.²² They reject the teachings of purgatory, and the *filioque*, the procession of the Holy Spirit as also from the Son.²³ With respect to the Blessed Virgin, the Eastern Orthodox Church’s concept of the *theotokos* or “God-bearer” went through development in the West that eventually proclaimed her ‘Mother of God.’ The Eastern Orthodox Church does not believe in the Immaculate Conception of Mary owing to the fact that they do not believe original sin transferred to all human beings, only its consequences did. In addition, they argue that if Mary were free from sin, she would not need a Savior in whom she rejoices in her Magnificat.

In common with the Latin Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church has closely adhered to the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431). They have retained apostolic succession without interruption tracing back to St. Mark the Evangelist, Apostle and Martyr. From a Roman Catholic perspective, they have valid orders and valid sacraments.²⁴

²⁰ Athanasius, *The Copts through the Ages* (Arab Republic of Egypt: State Information Service, 1973), 16, in Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 5.

²¹ The *mia physis* formula or miaphysitism refers to Cyril of Alexandria’s aforementioned christological formula.

²² Christian Cannuyer, “Ecclésiologie et Structure de l’Autorité dans l’Église Copte,” *Science et Esprit* 65, no. 1-2 (2013): 49, 64. The Coptic Church does not recognize Roman Catholic papal infallibility, but in practice the Coptic Pope wields more power than the Roman Catholic Pope. He sets the standard for orthodoxy in doctrinal matters, chooses auxiliary bishops, and ordains them personally. His authority is absolute in all matters doctrinal as evidenced by the number of documents that date back to the origins of the Egyptian church.

²³ Meinardus, “Coptic Orthodox Inculturation,” 73.

²⁴ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 9.

4.1 The Zeitoun Phenomenon

The following accounts associated with the manifestations of the Virgin Mary at Zeitoun rely on the books and journal articles by Jerome Palmer, Pearl Zaki, Cynthia Nelson, Francis Johnston, Victor DeVincenzo, and the collaborative work of ecumenical authors, Youssef Kamell, John Jackson, and Rebecca Jackson. Of these authors, Palmer, Zaki and Nelson were also firsthand eyewitnesses to some of the apparitions. Each author only reports fragments of the full narrative of the Zeitoun apparitions. Therefore, it is necessary to rely on a combination of authors to report these events (see section 4.2.4 for a critical assessment of these sources). Not all events narrated in support of the apparitions by some of these authors are historical fact, but Coptic affinity for prophetic stories renders it necessary to include them for a fuller contextualization of the reception and interpretation of these events. For a timeline of events related to the apparitions at Zeitoun, see Appendix B.

4.1.1 Biblical Account of the Holy Family's Flight to Egypt

Christian Scripture (Matthew 2:13-18) reveals that to escape the “Slaughter of the Innocents” edict of King Herod more than two thousand years ago, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take the Virgin Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt for safety.²⁵ The Holy Family fled from Jerusalem to Egypt where Jesus lived his early life together with his mother and foster father in several areas. The route they traveled was probably one frequently used by caravans and travelers journeying east to west,²⁶ from the Red Sea to Babylon.²⁷ Along the route of their travels, stations or historical shrines now stand honoring their stops. At one of these stations, Matariya, tradition records the existence of a large

²⁵ The historicity of this biblical text is discussed later in this chapter.

²⁶ Pearl Zaki, *Before Our Eyes: The Virgin Mary, Zeitoun, Egypt 1968 and 1969* (Goleta: Queenship Publishing, 2002), 1.

²⁷ Otto F. A. Meinardus, “Von der Mariophanie zum Gnadenbild: Zur ikonographischen Entwicklung der Gnadenbilder von Zeitun und Ard Babadeblu,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* 39, no. 4 (1990): 298.

sycamore tree under which the Virgin and her family rested.²⁸ This sycamore is a few miles from the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mary in Zeitoun.²⁹ According to Coptic popular belief, if one eats the fruit (*gimez*) of this tree, one will return to Egypt. The Virgin is believed to have eaten the fruit of this sycamore. For three years, the Holy Family traveled through Egypt. Cynthia Nelson, who visited Zeitoun at the time of the apparitions, writes that many Christian and Muslim women who are unable to conceive a child make pilgrimages to the sacred sycamore, and place votive offerings on its branches in the hope of becoming fertile. There are also reports that some Muslims bury their dead under this tree.³⁰

4.1.2 First Record of the Virgin's Intercession in the Coptic *Synaxarium*

The history of the Coptic Orthodox Church is contained in the Coptic *Synaxarium*, a compilation of hagiographies similar to the martyrology of the Roman Catholic Church. It records an event of the Virgin Mary's intercession during a deep crisis in Egyptian history during the time of Abram (fl. 975-978), the 62nd Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church.³¹ Zaki documents this tenth-century event of faith and prayer moving a mountain:

The record states that "ibn Killis, in an attempt to embarrass the Copts, brought the attention of the Caliph al Muizz the verse where Matthew (XVII, 20) records Jesus' saying 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.' The caliph thus called the patriarch, who confirmed the verse, and consequently the caliph commanded him to perform the miracle to prove the truth of his religion. The patriarch

²⁸ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, xxii. Zaki cites "Pope Kyrillos VI First Saw Vision of the Virgin Mary in 1910," an article that appeared in *The Egyptian Gazette* on May 16, 1968. The last paragraph traces the Holy Family's legendary route across the Sinai Desert to a city named Basta (today, Tel Basta). Later, they stopped at Mostorod near Zeitoun. Afterwards, they made stops in Belbis, Miniyet Ginah, Sammanud, Sakha in Kafr El Sheikh, Borollos, Ein Shams, Matariya, and Old Cairo. There is an old tree in Matariya named after the Virgin, under which it is believed the Holy Family rested according to the apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (see *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages*, Otto F. A. Meinardus (Cairo: American University Press, 2002), 90).

²⁹ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 1. According to tradition, this sycamore has been preserved through transplanting; the existing tree can be traced to the year 1672. In *History of Eastern Christianity* (Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1968), Aziz Atiya notes that the existing tree collapsed in 1906 under the weight of age though green shoots still keep sprouting from its branches.

³⁰ Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages*, 89-92. The oldest reference that connects this tree to the Virgin is found in the Arabic Infancy Gospel of the sixth century according to Syrian tradition.

³¹ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 9.

and the community then kept vigil and prayer for three days and three nights, and as he dozed inside the sanctuary, the Virgin directed him in a dream to a humble and unlettered tanner at a given spot. In this way he found his man of faith, and in picturesque performance the Maqattam hill was moved while the hierarchy and the community chanted a hymn of mercy behind the poor and unassuming tanner. An earthquake moved the mountain and the people were saved from persecution.” The said vigil was kept in the Mullaqa Church of Our Lady in Old Cairo a church still in existence today.³²

4.1.3 The Only Spoken Message by the Virgin at Zeitoun

Before the transfigurations of the Virgin began on April 2, 1968, reports made it well known among the Coptic faithful that Mary had appeared privately to Constantin Moussa, the pastor of St. Mary’s Church. The report said, “On one evening she met him on the steps in the church by the altar, she spoke to him, he fainted and fell to the floor.”³³ What did the Virgin say in this brief encounter? “Be Ready! I am coming to visit you and your people!”³⁴ History records that after this no other apparitions of the Virgin at Zeitoun contained any verbal message.

4.1.4 Transfigurations of *Al-Adhra’ al-Zaytun, Umm al-Noor*

On the night of April 2, 1968, the Virgin reportedly appeared atop the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mary in Zeitoun, a suburb in the Heliopolis district of Cairo, not far from the eastern edge of the Suez Canal where the Israeli army advanced and defeated Egypt during the Six-Day War just ten months earlier.³⁵ The church is located at the intersection of Tomanbey Street (the main street) and Khalil Lane.³⁶ The first to notice anything extraordinary were three mechanics, Farouk Mohammed Atwa, Hussein Awwad, and Yacout Ali Mocamoun, who were leaving the transportation garage across Tomanbey Street at the end of their work shift.

³² Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 9.

³³ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, Preface, xix. The exact date of this appearance or the report is not noted.

³⁴ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 169.

³⁵ Swann, *Great Apparitions of Mary*, 206. In ancient times, the modern city of Cairo was known as *On*, or Heliopolis (Greek for “the City of the Sun.”) The area around Heliopolis later became known as Mataria, today’s Cairo of which Zeitoun is a suburb.

³⁶ Khalil Lane was named after Ibrahim Pasha Khalil, the landowner who built the church in honor of and in response to a request from the Virgin Mary.

Thinking that the figure in white standing on top of the largest dome at the center of the roof holding on to the stone cross was that of a nun attempting to leap, one of the mechanics ran to summon the pastor while the other ran to bring the fire department and the rescue squad. The pastor immediately recognized the figure as that of the Virgin. As people gathered to watch the apparition, the woman slowly vanished. During the vision, one of the mechanics, Atwa, pointed a bandaged finger at the figure persuading her, “Lady, be careful, you’ll slip and get killed.”³⁷ The next day he was to have his finger amputated because gangrene had set in, but his doctor found it healed, making this the first record of a miraculous cure by God in the presence of the Virgin.³⁸

For the next three years, the Virgin’s reported appearances were frequent but unpredictable, numbering about 70 and witnessed by thousands of Christians, Muslims, Jews, people of other faiths, as well as those who identified themselves as atheists. People traveled from far off places to witness these transfigurations. Local newspapers, particularly *Watani* and *Al Ahram*, reported these events from the very early days. The generally accepted final sighting of the Virgin at Zeitoun is May 29, 1971.³⁹ The average crowd size on a particular night was in excess of 10,000 beginning in April 1968. On nights like April 30, 1968 when the apparition lasted for more than two hours, the crowd exceeded 100,000 giving people time to gather relatives and friends to witness the appearance.⁴⁰ Crowd control soon became a civic issue. The government ordered the demolition of the garage across the church and the felling of trees in the church’s vicinity so that people would not climb, fall and hurt themselves.⁴¹

³⁷ Meinardus, “Von der Mariophanie zum Gnadenbild,” 290.

³⁸ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 18.

³⁹ John H. Watson, *Among the Copts: Beliefs and Practices* (East Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2000), 155, in “Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968-1971): Egyptian Mariophanies in Historical, Interfaith, and Ecumenical Context,” Donald A. Westbrook, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 21, no. 2 (November 2017): 86.

⁴⁰ Victor DeVincenzo, “The Apparitions at Zeitoun, Egypt: An Historical Overview,” *The Journal of Religion and Psychical Research* 11, no. 1 (January 1988): 4.

⁴¹ Pearl Zaki, *Our Lord’s Mother Visits Egypt in 1968 & 1969* (Cairo: Dar Al Aalam Al Arabi, 1977), 22.

Her Physical Appearance

The initial witnesses were clear that the luminous figure was that of a woman, but the dazzling light made it difficult to recognize her features or to determine what she was wearing. As crowds gathered, they recognized the figure as the Virgin wearing a robe-like garment similar to common artistic depictions of Mary. Shouts of praise to the Virgin erupted spontaneously, and the apparitional figure acknowledged these shouts by bowing to the crowds.⁴²

Nelson, who was teaching in Cairo when the apparitions took place, witnessed the events and studied local reactions to the phenomenon. She arrived in Zeitoun on June 1, 1968, by which time the Coptic Church and state had authenticated the apparitions, and the Ministry of Tourism had already published pamphlets narrating the events since April. Foreign diplomatic missions in Cairo and Egyptian embassies abroad were sent copies of these pamphlets. Each night, bright flashes of light preceded the onset of the Virgin's apparitions. The crowd responded with clapping and shouts of "There she is! There she is!" A woman near Nelson kept praying to the Virgin and thanking her for coming to Egypt. She kept referring to the Virgin as *Umm al-Noor* (Mother of Light) or *Ya Habibi*, an affectionate phrase meaning 'O my dearest one' used by Copts and Muslims when addressing God.⁴³

Meaningful Gestures and Unusual Phenomena Accompanying the Apparitions

Victor DeVincenzo, who supported the supernatural origin of these apparitions, states that they consisted of both full and partial figures in at least ten different recorded forms or shapes, paranormal lights shooting across the sky, clouds of reddish sweet-smelling incense emerging and dissipating, luminous dove-like birds moving rapidly and noiselessly without wings flapping across the night sky. At times, the birds flew in pairs, at other times in the

⁴² DeVincenzo, "Apparitions at Zeitoun," 4-5.

⁴³ Cynthia Nelson, "The Virgin of Zeitoun," *Worldview: A Journal of Religion and International Affairs* 16 (1973): 8.

formation of a Christian cross. Wagih Risk Matta, Fawzi Mansour, and Ali Ibrahim were photographers who took the pictures reproduced in books written by Palmer, Johnston, and Zaki.⁴⁴ The Coptic *Synaxarium* records the apparition of April 2 as follows:

Since that night [in Zeitoun on 2 April 1968] the pure Virgin transfigured in different spiritual views in front of thousands of masses, Egyptians and foreigners, Christians and non-Christians, men, women, and children. Spiritual beings formed like doves would appear before, during, and after the transfiguration zooming through the sky in a way raising the human from a materialistic to a heavenly atmosphere.⁴⁵

St. Mary's Coptic Church has a large central dome and four smaller domes on each of its four corners. The dramatic nature of the visions varied from night to night. The curvature of the domes with no room for a parapet would make it impossible for a human figure, screen, or plate to stand freely, or be mounted. Though the Virgin spoke no words during her appearances, there were reports of a number of meaningful gestures. She bowed at the waist and greeted the crowds gathered below moving her arms in a sign of blessing. She knelt in front of one of the stone crosses. On one occasion, she was seen carrying the Christ Child, while on others she held out an olive branch to the people. In general, her facial features were not visible to most of the witnesses because the form was too luminous, but some testified to having glimpsed outlines of a nose and mouth, or of her robes swaying in the breeze.⁴⁶

The Virgin is reported to have appeared over the domes of the church, moving from one side to the other for people all round to see her. She appeared through the windows of the large dome and between trees in the courtyard in front of the church. She appeared in full figure, bust size, full silhouette in a circle of bluish-white light, as well as free standing with no surrounding

⁴⁴ DeVincenzo, "Apparitions at Zeitoun," 5-6. Some of these images are viewable at <http://www.zeitun-eg.org> (accessed April 25, 2018).

⁴⁵ *Synaxarion*, in Westbrook, "Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968-1971)," 86.

⁴⁶ DeVincenzo, "Apparitions at Zeitoun," 6.

circle of light.⁴⁷ Eyewitnesses claimed that she would slowly ascend into the night sky or disappear suddenly. The duration of her appearances varied from one or two minutes to several hours. Coptic Bishop Gregorius and other eyewitnesses on June 8, 1968 reported that the Virgin appeared continuously for more than seven hours well into the early hours of the next day.⁴⁸

The Atmosphere

Anglican correspondent, Ronald Bullivant, recalled the atmosphere during his pilgrimage to Zeitoun at the time of the apparitions. He described the surroundings of the church as filled with singing and chanting of litanies and prayers by groups of Copts, Greeks, Latins, and Muslims. Most people held lighted candles. The pastor and church officials were on hand to care for many of the sick who filled the church, praying in groups, or sitting or sleeping in the pews. These officials enthusiastically talked about the apparitions and the healings that were taking place. Bullivant writes,

There was an air of deep spirituality and it felt like one was back in the days of our Lord who was often surrounded by those who had been healed of diseases or other ailments. Outside the church, hymns and prayers were relayed over a loudspeaker system. Long lists of the names of the sick were read. The heavy, jarring sound of Coptic chants were heard periodically, while Muslim calls to prayer by the muezzin from the minarets of surrounding mosques provided a continuous background.⁴⁹

Francis Johnston writes that Wadie Shumbo, a Protestant, employed at the engineering department of Mobil Oil Company testified:

I have seen the Virgin, I tell you. I have seen her in full body. I have not seen shadows. Thousands and thousands of people, fifty, a hundred thousand from villages and towns around, put their sheets on the street and sang hymns to the Virgin. We never did this before, not publicly.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Raymond Bayless, "Marian Apparitions at Zeitoun, Cairo," *Journal of the Southern California Society for Psychological Research* 2 (1981): 21, in DeVincenzo, "Apparitions at Zeitoun," 6.

⁴⁸ DeVincenzo, "Apparitions at Zeitoun," 6-7.

⁴⁹ Ronald Bullivant, "The Visions of the Mother of God at Zeitoun," *Eastern Churches Review* 3, no. 1 (1970): 75.

⁵⁰ Francis Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary* (Devon: Augustine Publishing Co., 1980), 23.

Pearl Zaki, an American Protestant from Minneapolis traveled with her son to Cairo to witness the apparitions after news of their serial nature reached her. They spent many summer nights in Zeitoun without seeing anything unusual, but finally witnessed the visions. She writes:

We went home tired but very happy. Truly, I had seen for myself a mystery of God that He had displayed in all of its glory for thousands to witness. Before my eyes, apart from myself, an external vision, had I not been there still she would have been there. From the descriptions of other appearances before and after the one I saw, I know many had seen the Virgin Mary much more clearly than I.⁵¹

4.1.5 Witnesses, Miraculous Cures and Healings, and Authenticating the Apparitions

The thousands of seers who affirm having seen the Virgin Mary above the Coptic Orthodox Church make the Zeitoun phenomenon a “public revelation.” Among the witnesses were Muslims, Christians, Jews, as well as those with no religious affiliation. Besides the three Muslim mechanics at the garage, Muslims and Christians from all walks-of-life witnessed the apparitions on different nights from April 1968 to May 1971. Each appearance was different from the ones before. Eyewitnesses gave their testimonials to local newspapers and periodicals.⁵²

Zeitoun is no exception to the pattern of cures and healings witnessed at other sites of Marian apparitions like Lourdes, La Salette, and Fátima.⁵³ Swann describes the healings and cures as embracing a wide spectrum of maladies, many of them terminal, beginning the first night of the apparitions. According to medical experts, there was no explanation for the healing of permanent blindness, paralysis of the limbs, hernias, urinary bladder cancer, thyroid cancer, deafness, high blood pressure, bacteriological and viral infections, and mental derangement.⁵⁴

Johnston, too, writes about these miraculous cures:

The finger of God would flash down unpredictably: some were instantaneously healed in the presence of the vision, or shortly afterwards; others were restored to health on nights when there was no apparition or even during the day. Nor were the cures confined to

⁵¹ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 53. Chapter 5 (pp. 45-53) contains Zaki’s full account of her experience. Images of her son, Nagi’s drawings of what he witnessed can be seen on pp. 99-100.

⁵² Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 111-114.

⁵³ DeVincenzo, “Apparitions at Zeitoun,” 9.

⁵⁴ Swann, *Great Apparitions of Mary*, 210.

Christians. Moslems [sic], Jews, and even unbelievers felt—and still feel to this day—the healing hand of the Good Physician.⁵⁵

Following the initial reports of the Virgin’s appearances and claims of miraculous cures, Coptic Patriarch Kyrillos VI moved immediately to investigate these apparitions. On April 23, 1968, just three weeks after the first apparition, the Patriarch appointed a provisional delegation of three prelates—Gregorius Matta, Hanna Abdel-Messih, and Benjamin Kamel to verify these events. On the date of their appointment, “all three prelates saw the apparition in full form, bowing before the cross on the top of the Church dome, blessing the multitude, and appearing inside a luminous circle. A few nights later they saw the formations of luminous doves.”⁵⁶ Kyrillos VI also appointed a medical commission of seven physicians and professors headed by Dr. Shafik Abd-el Malek of the medical school of Cairo University, to retrieve records, documents, and statements, and to analyze cases concerning miraculous cures.⁵⁷

4.1.6 Official Confirmations

Reports or statements from the delegation of prelates, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the government validated the authenticity of the apparitions.

Coptic Orthodox Clerical Report

The clerical report of the Coptic Pope’s delegation issued on May 5, 1968 included an account of the apparitions and expressed faith in their validity. An excerpt of the report reads:

Upon summarizing the reports of the garage workmen, we have come to the conclusion that the Blessed Virgin Mary has appeared several times on and in the domes of the church since April 2, 1968. The appearances have mostly been observed by the workmen of the garage whose witnesses have been confirmed by the inhabitants of Zeitoun, Muslims and Christians. Multitudes of people from different parts of the country have all watched the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, and a great number of them have certified the certainty of the appearances, sending with enthusiastic written messages, their testimony.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary*, 26. Not everyone with an ailment was cured during the apparitions. For some a cure took place after a prolonged period, for others there was no cure at all.

⁵⁶ DeVincenzo, “Apparitions at Zeitoun,” 7.

⁵⁷ Kamell et al., *A Lady of Light*, 81. Palmer and Zaki have also documented testimonials of miraculous healings and cures in their books.

⁵⁸ Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary*, 11.

An official statement from the Coptic Orthodox Church followed the clerical report.

Excerpts from the Statement of Kyrillos VI:

Since the evening of Tuesday April 2, 1968 (the 24th of Baramhat, 1684 A.M.), the apparitions of the Holy Virgin Saint Mary, Mother of Light, have continued in the Coptic Orthodox Church named after Her in Zeitoun, Cairo. ...Thousands of people from different denominations and religions, Egyptians and foreign visitors, clergy and scientists, from different classes and professions, all observed the apparitions. The description of each apparition as of the time, location and configuration was identically witnessed by all people, which makes this apparition unique and sublime.

Two important aspects accompanied these apparitions: The first is an incredible revival of the faith in God, the other world and the saints, leading to repentance and conversion of many who strayed away from the faith. The second are the numerous miracles of healing which were verified by many physicians to be miraculous in nature.⁵⁹

Kyrillos VI himself had not yet visited the site of the transfigurations of the Virgin. When interviewed by *The Egyptian Gazette*, the Patriarch explained that he had not visited Zeitoun since the apparitions began because “he had been seeing the vision of the Mother of the Light, the Dove of Peace, the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, since his early childhood.”⁶⁰ In the same May 16, 1968 article, the *Gazette* reported the Patriarch’s account that the Virgin had appeared in 1910 at his family home in Alexandria, and that the vision had cured a family member who had been ailing for some time. He also added that he wanted to give the people a chance to witness the apparitions themselves and make up their minds so that his judgment would not influence theirs.⁶¹

The Government Documental Report

Among the first skeptics of the phenomenon of apparitions and miracles as documented in other approved apparitions are secular authorities. With the wide spectrum of witnesses, Zeitoun became an exception to this pattern. The Director of the General Information and

⁵⁹ Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary*, 12-13.

⁶⁰ “Pope Kyrillos first saw vision of Virgin in 1910,” *The Egyptian Gazette*, 16 May 1968, as depicted in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 50.

⁶¹ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 50.

Complaints Department submitted a report to the Minister, Hafez Ghanem, emphatically confirming the appearances of the Virgin Mary. The document states:

The official investigations have been carried out with the results that it has been considered an undeniable fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary has been appearing on Zeitoun Church in a clear and bright luminous body seen by all present in front of the Church whether Christian or Muslim.⁶²

The government report also certified the accounts of the garage workers as correct.

Explanations of fabricated neon pictures by tricksters were unfounded. The report also included the official statements of Cardinal Istaphanos, Patriarch of the Catholic Copts, and Archimandrite Airut of the Greek Catholic Church.⁶³

The Silence of the Vatican

As the Roman Catholic Church traditionally does not make official pronouncements about apparitions, not even the ones that take place in a Roman Catholic context, it is not surprising that there was no official statement from The Holy See. Paul VI, however, sent two investigators to Zeitoun and they reported that they saw the apparition (*Al Ahram*, May 6, 1968). Even so, The Holy See felt no obligation to pass judgment about the Zeitoun event.⁶⁴

Representing The Holy See in Cairo, Cardinal Istaphanos, the Coptic Catholic Patriarch, released an official statement that was included in the Government Documental Report.⁶⁵

Local and International Media Accounts

Pope Kyrillos' official statement made headlines in all six Cairo newspapers: *Al Ahram*, *Al Goumhouryia*, *Al-Akhbar*, *Watani*, *The Egyptian Gazette*, *Progres Dimanche*.⁶⁶ The *Al Ahram* and *Watani* regularly reported the apparitions even before Kyrillos VI's official proclamation. Given the

⁶² Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 111.

⁶³ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 111.

⁶⁴ Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary*, 14. The Coptic Orthodox Church likewise did not feel compelled to make a statement on the apparitions at Fátima in 1917.

⁶⁵ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 115.

⁶⁶ Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary*, 12; Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 32-40.

unprecedented nature of the Zeitoun phenomenon, it is surprising that only a few international newspapers reported the official statement. Among them were *The Times* (London), *Le Figaro* (Paris), *The New York Times* (USA),⁶⁷ and other smaller newspapers in circulation like the *Sunday World-Herald* in Omaha, Nebraska (USA).⁶⁸

4.1.7 Feast Day Commemorating the Apparitions

There are thirty-two days honoring Mary in the Coptic Calendar. The feast of the Virgin of Zeitoun is recorded in the Coptic *Synaxarium* as April 2 (Baramhat 24).

4.1.8 Incontestable Photographs and the Skeptics

The serial nature of the apparitions gave witnesses the time and opportunity to take photographs and films of the apparitions, images that provided incontestable evidence authenticating these supranormal phenomena. Swann claims that, “If incontestable photos are accepted as evidence of facts, then the photos of the repeated appearances of the Holy Mother at Zeitoun must be accepted as recording a factual apparition. And, indeed, those photos permit a positive reassessment of all the earlier major apparitions of the Holy Mother.”⁶⁹

The photograph by the Copt Wagih Risk Matta first appeared in the *Al Ahram* daily on May 5, 1968. This photograph was one of two taken by Matta on April 13. The head photographer for the daily newspaper declared that there was no tampering with any of the film or negatives.⁷⁰ In her book, *Our Lord’s Mother Visits Egypt*, Zaki includes images of the apparitions on different nights. She notes that eyewitnesses verified all the photographs,⁷¹ claiming that the Virgin looked exactly like one or more of the photographs depending on the dates they

⁶⁷ Johnston, *When Millions Saw Mary*, 12.

⁶⁸ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 41. See p. 43 for an image of the report in *The New York Times*.

⁶⁹ Swann, *Great Apparitions of Mary*, 209.

⁷⁰ Zaki, *Our Lord’s Mother Visits Egypt*, 14. Matta himself reported a physical cure during a visit to St. Mary’s Church.

⁷¹ See Zaki, *Our Lord’s Mother Visits Egypt*, 3, 5, 7, 9, 13-16, 28, 30.

witnessed the apparitions. She affirms that measures were taken to eliminate any possibility of a hoax. Authorities searched a 15-mile radius to verify if any electronic devices were used. Skeptics suspected that something was being reflected on the domes of the church from the garage across the street, but the apparitions continued even after the garage was demolished. Some thought that when the Virgin appeared between tree branches it created an illusion, but she continued to appear even after felling the trees.⁷² Despite the availability of authenticated photographs, bizarre reports concerning the apparitions circulated. One such report according to Swann, suggested that Russians were projecting images of the Virgin using a space satellite, Telestar, without stopping to question why Communist Russians who discouraged religious practice would want to support a phenomenon that had the potential of reinforcing religious faith.⁷³

This historical background spills over to the next section, a historical-critical analysis of the Zeitoun apparitions that reviews and assesses some of the explanations for the Virgin's return to Egypt, her appearances at Zeitoun, and the interpretations of her silence.

⁷² See Zaki, *Our Lord's Mother Visits Egypt*, 22.

⁷³ Swann, *Great Apparitions of Mary*, 209.

4.2 Historical-Critical Analysis of the Zeitoun Phenomenon

Various explanations evolved for the Virgin's appearance at Zeitoun. Egypt thrives on prophetic stories and tales of piety and miracles. However, Aziz Atiya claims that the interpretations of the Zeitoun apparitions linked to prophetic stories of local Coptic tradition make it difficult to discern legend from reality, and orthodox from apocryphal accounts.⁷⁴ The historical, political, sociological, theological, and devotional dimensions of these apparitions help in analyzing two questions: Why did the Virgin Mary appear in Egypt and at Zeitoun? What are some of the interpretations for her silence? This section concludes with a critical assessment of these interpretations.

4.2.1 Why Egypt?

The absence of a verbalized message during her appearances at Zeitoun has led to different speculative stories concerning the Virgin's visit to Egypt. These narratives range from the Virgin's own announcement to written prophecy, from links to prior apparitions to signs of hope in the aftermath of Egypt's defeat in war.

4.2.1.1 *The Virgin Announces Her Return to Egypt during 1962 Apparitions in Lithuania*⁷⁵

The following is an excerpt from Bulletin #3, "Lithuania and Egypt," issued on January 11, 1969, of a report of Mary's visit to a young girl at Janonis in the parish of Skiemoniui, Lithuania.

On July 13 and 14 in 1962 the Virgin Mary visited Lithuania. She was witnessed by a girl named Ramute Macvyte-Matiukaite who was born January 23, 1944. The evening of the Virgin's first visit, Friday, July 13, 1962, was accomplished in silence. Ramute was alone when she saw her on this night. After this experience, she returned to her family to tell them about the visit. She was counselled by her mother to return again to the same place at the same time the next evening. She did. She asked other members of her family to go with her, but because of the rain that night they didn't. Again, Ramute alone at the site, found the Virgin Mary standing on a table, not an altar as the first time. Ramute spoke with the Virgin Mary for ten minutes. Her final words asking the Virgin Mary about her coming again to visit were: "Then I asked Holy Mary, 'When will you again appear?' Holy Mary answered me, 'I will not appear here again. I WILL APPEAR IN EGYPT WITH

⁷⁴ Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity*, 23, in Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 5.

⁷⁵ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 63.

TWO ANGELS. If anything goes wrong, come here to pray and I will give you advice!” She went over my head and disappeared.⁷⁶

When Lithuanians heard what Mary is reported to have said in 1962, they found it unbelievable because Egypt was predominantly Muslim. However, like Vailankanni, Zeitoun is another instance where Mary’s reported appearances are not predicated on persons or places being Christian. Besides Zeitoun, there are reports of Marian apparitions at Al-Shoubra (1981, 1986), Assiut (2000) and Warraq el Haddar (2009), all in Egypt and all silent apparitions. These apparitions are addressed in the assessment that follows.

4.2.1.2 *Prophetic Link to the 1917 Apparitions at Fátima*

During the early period of the apparitions, Egyptians began to link the Zeitoun phenomenon with the 1917 apparitions of the Virgin Mary to three shepherd children in Fátima, a hamlet in Portugal bearing the name of the prophet Mohammed’s daughter, the only one to have raised children in his name. Nelson writes that at Fátima, the Virgin gave a special message to Lúcia dos Santos to be sent in a letter to the Catholic pope with the stipulation that it not be opened for fifty years. At the time the letter is opened, Egypt would experience a great upheaval and suffer defeat, but the Virgin would protect the country just as Egypt has protected the Holy Family when they fled from Herod.⁷⁷

4.2.1.3 *Egyptian Defeat in the Six-Day War*

After Egypt’s defeat in the Six-Day War (June 5-10, 1967), the government worked hard to reverse the sense of despair among the people. Army officers and government officials were

⁷⁶ Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 11. For a detailed account of Mary’s apparitions in Lithuania on July 13-14, 1962, as well as on July 25, see pp. 178-181. A Lithuanian resource that corroborates this account is <http://www.anykstenai.lt/asmenys/asm.php?id=981> (accessed April 25, 2019).

⁷⁷ Nelson, “Virgin of Zeitoun,” 9. Nelson also includes another prophetic story told by the wife of a university mathematics professor who witnessed the apparitions. Four or five years prior to the apparitions in Zeitoun, a girl in Beirut had a vision of Mari Guirgis (St. George) who told her that the Virgin Mary would visit Egypt, and that Egyptians should not worry because she would not forsake them.

held responsible for the loss to Israel; they were arrested and tried a number of times. In light of the defeat, just a few days before the first apparition, President Nasser outlined his plans for the future of Egypt in a document that became known as the “March 30 Manifesto.” Playing to the susceptibility of the Egyptians, when the apparitions began three days later, the government was receptive to the events, hailing the Virgin Mary as a sign that God was on their side. People interpreted her appearances as *bishara kheir*, a sign of good things to come,⁷⁸ perhaps even an omen indicating that God would insure an Arab victory against the Israelis in the future.⁷⁹

From a Christian perspective, the Copts perceived the Zeitoun apparitions as God once again choosing them in light of their declining social relevance and sectarian tensions with Muslims who have been favored by successive Egyptian presidents and their regimes. They consider themselves a “chosen people” under a charismatic leader, the Coptic Pope.⁸⁰

4.2.1.4 *Written Prophecy from a Student at the Goethe Institute*

Nelson’s account includes a written prophecy given by a seventeen-year old student at the Goethe Institute in Cairo stating that, “one day the Virgin will appear in Egypt, and will do so for a long time. Then she will disappear gradually. Seven years after this apparition the majority of Egyptians will be Christians, leaving the Muslims, a minority.”⁸¹

These are some of the historical events and prophetic stories used to support the claims of the Virgin’s appearances in Egypt. Addressing why she appeared at Zeitoun has lent itself to a different set of interpretations.

⁷⁸ Nelson, “Virgin of Zeitoun,” 8, in Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 215.

⁷⁹ Nelson, “Virgin of Zeitoun,” 9.

⁸⁰ Cannuyer, “Écclésiologie et Structure,” 50.

⁸¹ Nelson, “Virgin of Zeitoun,” 10.

4.2.2 Why Zeitoun?

Why did the Mother of Light appear at St. Mary's Church in Zeitoun? Explanations in response to this question are replete with biblical symbolism and historical significance.

4.2.2.1 *History of the Church of St. Mary and Its Location*

Nelson records the following narrative in her account. In 1925, a wealthy Copt landowner, Ibrahim Pasha Khalil, was to build a villa on some land in Zeitoun. He claimed that one night he had a dream in which the Virgin Mary asked him to stop building his villa, and instead to donate the land and build a church in her honor. In return, she promised to appear later at the church that he was to build. She would keep appearing for a year and perform miracles. Khalil donated the land and built the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mary. However, nothing happened until forty-three years later. After the Virgin Mary appeared on April 2, 1968, few of the older generation of Copts remembered the story of the church's origins. Those who did perceived the apparitions as a sign of fulfillment of the Virgin's sacred promise.⁸² The Church of St. Mary is located close to Matariya, on the legendary route traveled by the Holy Family in Egypt. Following the steps of the Holy Family is one of the traditions that Copts hold on to especially because of its scriptural roots (Matthew 2:13-23).⁸³

4.2.2.2 *Return of the Relics of St. Mark, Evangelist, First Coptic Patriarch, and Martyr*

Palmer writes that after the death of St. Mark in 68 A.D., he was buried in Baucalia, Egypt. In 827, Venetian merchants eager to have the saint grace their city, moved the body without the head to Venice, Italy, where it remained until Paul VI had it returned to the Coptic Church and interred in the new Cathedral of St. Mark in Abbasia, Cairo in June 1968. Egyptian Copts interpreted this gesture as an ongoing sign of reconciliation between the Roman Catholic

⁸² Nelson, "Virgin of Zeitoun," 9; Swann, *Great Apparitions of Mary*, 209.

⁸³ Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages*, 83-86; Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 6.

Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church, with some viewing it as a blessing made possible by the apparitions.⁸⁴

4.2.2.3 Biblical Symbolism of Zeitoun and its Link to Recent Egyptian History

The Arabic *Zeitoun* or *Zaytun* in English means “olive” which has biblical symbolism for peace and unity, much needed in the aftermath of Egypt’s defeat in the Six-Day War, and the War of Attrition (1967-1970) that encased the major span of the apparitions.⁸⁵ Internally, Egypt was rife with hostilities between Muslims and Coptic Christians dating back to the Arab Conquest (639-642).⁸⁶ The appearance of the Virgin sometimes wielding an olive branch symbolizes an inducement to reconciliation, unity, and peace. Donald Westbrook writes that the Egyptian Coptic *Mary* shares much in common with Islam’s *Maryam*. In Islam, Isa or Jesus is a prophet while Mary is exalted as one of four holy women in the Qur’an, the only person with an entire *surah* (19) dedicated to her. Westbrook also notes that there is no tradition of Marian apparitions in Islam, but the affirmation of angels and *jinn* as spiritual presence “leaves open the possibility that Mary in heavenly form could make earthly appearances and transmit divine communications to Muslims or Christians in any setting.”⁸⁷

One of the characteristics that make the Zeitoun apparitions unique is the Virgin’s silence. This is not the first Marian apparition in complete silence, though.⁸⁸ How has her silence been interpreted is the subject of the next part of this section.

⁸⁴ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 9-10.

⁸⁵ Theodore H. Partrick, *Traditional Egyptian Christianity: A History of the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Greensboro: Fisher Park Press, 1996), 51-139, in Westbrook, “Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968-1971),” 91.

⁸⁶ Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages*, 103, in Westbrook, “Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968-1971),” 91.

⁸⁷ Westbrook, “Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968-1971),” 91.

⁸⁸ Claims of silent apparitions of Mary reported through the centuries are few. Yet the sites of their alleged occurrence have become centers of Marian pilgrimage with churches, chapels, shrines, and basilicas raised to endure their memory. Reports of miraculous healings and cures induce the devout to flock to these places every year. During the first two apparitions to Hindu boys at Vailankanni in the 16th century there were brief requests. The third instance in the mid-17th century was a Marian manifestation that Portuguese sailors claimed saved them from the tempest in the Bay of Bengal (described in chapter 3). In 1717, at Aparecida near São Paulo, Brazil, three

4.2.3 Interpreting the Virgin's Silence

During the seventy appearances of the Virgin above the Coptic Church, witnesses claim that she did not speak a single word. Of the many silent apparitions, Zeitoun is closely identified with the singular apparition of Mary on the gable of a village chapel in Knock, Ireland.

4.2.3.1 *Our Lady of Silence at Knock*

On August 21, 1879, on what came to be known as *Cnoc Mhuire* or Our Lady's Holy Hill, fifteen visionaries ranging in age from 5 to 75 experienced silent apparitions of the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, St. John the Evangelist, and the Lamb at different times in about two hours in pouring rain. As daylight faded, the visions became clearer. The figures were of a bright white hue and remained stationary. Amidst the wind and the rain, the ground around the figures was completely dry. After the apparition, the same ground at the chapel's gable became wet, and the gable itself became dark without the light that earlier emanated from the figures.⁸⁹

How are Knock and Zeitoun different from other modern apparitions? First, the mix of witnesses at Knock though significantly fewer than Zeitoun was of different ages. At Knock, the witnesses were three men, seven women, two teenage boys, a girl, and two children. They

fishermen (Domingos Garcia, João Alves, and Felipe Pedroso) found the head and body of a statue of Our Lady who is believed to have performed a miracle when they were fishing in the Paraíba river near Guaratingetá. In 1842, in Rome, Italy, the Virgin reportedly appeared to a Jewish banker, Marie Alphonse Ratisbonne. Though there was no spoken message, the banker attributed the vision for his conversion to the Catholic faith, his joining the priesthood and starting a ministry for the conversion of Jews, as well as assisting in the founding of the Sisterhood of Our Lady of Zion. Reports claim that Dong Lu, a village in Baoding (Hebei province of north China) experienced two silent visions of Our Lady in 1900 and 1905. The first vision was an image of Mary as a Chinese empress holding the Infant Jesus; the second a vision of a cloud surrounded by a spinning sun and the Holy Family, the Heavenly Father, and the Holy Spirit in the form of dove and angels. In 1954, students and school staff at a Coptic girl's school in Jerusalem, Israel, saw visions of Mary moving in the classroom situated above the altar of St. Anthony's Church as well as above the principal's office. Though St. Anthony's Church became a center of pilgrimage for Christians and Muslims, the Copts did not feel favored by Mary's visit. Sources: Cruz, *See How She Loves Us*; Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*; Maunder, *Our Lady of the Nations*; Varghese, *God-Sent*; Walsh, *Apparitions and Shrines of Heaven's Bright Queen*, and The Miracle Hunter, <http://www.miraclehunter.com/> (accessed September 30, 2018).

⁸⁹ The Miracle Hunter, "Our Lady of Knock, Ireland (1879)," http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/knock/index.html (accessed October 1, 2018); Knock, Ireland's National Marian Shrine, <https://www.knockshrine.ie/history/> (accessed October 1, 2018).

claimed experiencing different emotions like wonder, happiness, devotion, exaltation of the spirit, and became tearful during the apparitions, but none of them heard a word or received any sign or interior message. As Delaney describes in Chapter 2, the Virgin asked visionaries to pray for sinners at Lourdes, pleaded for conversion at La Salette, and for prayer and penance at Fátima, but at Knock and at Zeitoun there was no verbalized message.⁹⁰ Setting aside Mary's silence at Zeitoun for now, how have apparitionists interpreted her silence at Knock?

The silence at Knock, writes Mary Purcell, is “an invitation to ponder the symbolism of the altar with the Lamb and the Cross, the position and demeanor of the three figures.” In *The Secret of Knock*, Michael O'Carroll states the first lesson of this apparition is the centrality of the Eucharist with the altar and the sacrificial Lamb, Mary's gesture, a priestly St. John, and St. Joseph in an attitude of respect. No name or phrase given to this apparition in popular devotion clues the faithful to its doctrinal meaning. Therefore, Knock invites scrutiny, wonder, and meditation. It is a reminder of Mary's role as Mediatrix and the unique character of her intercession because of her Assumption, and as celebrated by the church, her Coronation.⁹¹

Four of the witnesses, Purcell writes, said that Mary appeared to be praying, as though interceding for her people, to be their advocate, and obtaining favors for them. This has led theologians to interpret Mary as described in the vision at Knock according to church tradition as the Mediatrix of All Graces.⁹² Our Lady of Knock in her silence offers a strange attraction for

⁹⁰ Mary Purcell, “Our Lady of Silence,” in Delaney, *Woman Clothed with the Sun*, 141-142.

⁹¹ Purcell, “Our Lady of Silence,” 142-143. At the chapel gable, visionaries claimed they saw an altar at the center and at a higher level than the three figures, with a Lamb above and resting on it. Between St. Joseph and St. John, Mary appeared as Queen (with crown) and as Mystical Rose (with a rose on her brow). Joseph was bowing to her, and John raised his right hand in her direction. Her gaze and hands were uplifted. None of the adult witnesses had ever seen a statue or a painting of Our Lady with this gesture and attitude. However, authorities on Marian art claim a similarity between what the visionaries saw at Knock and early Christian paintings in Roman catacombs. These paintings depict the Virgin as Advocate, or *Orante*, with her hands raised in prayer similar to a priest during Mass. It should be reiterated that Christ as the One Redeemer mediates all grace. Any privileges that the Church assigns to Mary are subordinate to that of Christ.

⁹² Purcell, “Our Lady of Silence,” 142-143.

all—a hidden message and a blessed consolation—an invitation to look beyond her to the altar and the Lamb ready for the sacrifice and to accompany her on the journey to God.⁹³ Knock, therefore, affirms that silence can convey messages without the aid of oral communication or written words. Nearly ninety years later, the Virgin reaffirms such an interpretation when she appears in Egypt.

4.2.3.2 *The Silence of the Virgin at Zeitoun*

With respect to Mary's silence at Zeitoun, the question as to her purpose looks at other non-verbal cues like her physical gestures and cosmic phenomena that accompanied some of her visitations. Witnesses testified that they saw the Virgin kneeling before the cross atop the church dome. Her disposition of prayer and meditation, her actions of bowing and humility, her greeting the crowds with a cross or an olive branch, her signs of blessing, her carrying the Child Jesus, the presence of doves, and the odor of incense have been symbolically interpreted.⁹⁴

The interpretations of these signs, symbols, and gestures have in common a general call to piety and peaceful cohabitation. Hearden writes that the olive branch symbolizing peace, and gestures of blessing may be a plea for peace in a community fraught with tensions between two traditions that revere the Virgin, though each with a different understanding of her story and significance.⁹⁵ She affirms that the carrying of the Christ Child is significant for both Christians and Muslims in that such an image reminds Christians of the vulnerability of Jesus' humanity and a number of doctrines concerning God's solicitous love for the world. Muslims may recall *surah* 19 in the Holy Qur'an in which Maryam showed her newborn child to a hostile world. In this *surah*, the child wishes away their hostilities and identifies himself as a great prophet sent

⁹³ Purcell, "Our Lady of Silence," 143-44.

⁹⁴ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 43; Zaki, *Before Our Eyes*, 169.

⁹⁵ Maura Hearden, "Ambassador for the Word," 18-38, in Hearden, "Lessons from Zeitoun," 416.

to show the people the way to God.⁹⁶ The gestures of bowing before the crosses on the dome of the church welcome interpretations by both traditions—Christians may interpret it as validation of Christ’s crucifixion and its theological significance while Muslims who do not believe in the crucifixion may interpret it as a call to respect Christians and Jews.

4.2.4 Critical Assessment, Commentary, and Other Considerations

Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands witnessed the apparitions at Zeitoun, one must not rule out the possibility of error where human subjectivity colors the interpretation of events. The Virgin Mary holds a place of honor among Coptic Christians and Muslims. Therefore, as John Jackson points out, it is possible that the apparitions evoked certain responses that affected the meaning Mary’s appearances brought to their lives in terms of emotional security in a context of deplorable living conditions, ongoing hostilities between Christians and Muslims, and collective despair. Embracing the apparitions means reaffirming the Christian religious worldview that God’s Spirit is intervening in the world through the person of Mary, and that God cares about the human condition. The poor in Egypt might find meaning in that there is more to life than their temporal predicament, a religious conviction of both Christianity and Islam though each faith conceptualizes the afterlife differently.⁹⁷ Even the doves have significance in Coptic liturgy that refers to Mary as “the beautiful dove.”⁹⁸ As religious convictions can blur human objectivity, Jackson suggests that while some or all of the apparition reports appear credible, they may be erroneous interpretations of natural events.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 416-417.

⁹⁷ John P. Jackson, *Lady of Light*, 194, 196-197.

⁹⁸ Rebecca S. Jackson, *Lady of Light*, 253. The Roman Catholic hymn “Hail Mary: Gentle Woman” composed by Carey Landry (1975) refers to her as “peaceful dove.”

⁹⁹ Jackson, *Lady of Light*, 197.

In the absence of a verbalized message by the Virgin, the different interpretations based on Coptic folklore and prophetic stories as to why Mary returned to Egypt and visited Zeitoun appear to be cases of speculation, autosuggestion or wishful attributions to past events some of which are ahistorical. With the exception of the work of Youssef Kamell, John Jackson, and Rebecca Jackson, the documentary evidence of the witness accounts of Nelson, Palmer, and Zaki, and the writings of DeVincenzo and Johnston uncritically report these narratives. However, a critical reception of these accounts must take into consideration the attention they draw in unifying the popular masses and their impact on popular piety. In this light, attributing these apparitions as the “cause” or “effect” of some prior or subsequent event raises questions.

First, the biblical event of the Flight into Egypt by the family of Mary is unverifiable. It is a mythical account that developed from Hosea 11:1 (“... out of Egypt I called my son”) that Egyptian Copts passed down the ages with pride. At the time of Hosea (ca. 8th century BCE), many people including Egyptian and Assyrian kings were referred to as sons of God. Hosea’s verse does not make clear the identity of the “son.” This does not mean that the family of Mary did not journey to Egypt as narrated in the apocryphal Infancy Gospel of James. It just leaves open the possibility that the story is myth rather than historical fact.

Second, Zeitoun is another example where apparitions have been politically manipulated. Nasser’s government hailed the apparitions as some kind of “signum magnum” that God would protect Egyptians, playing to the susceptibility of the people after the country’s defeat in the Six-Day War the year before. Ironically, the major period of the apparitions was not a time of peace for Egypt as they occurred in parallel with Nasser’s War of Attrition (1967-1970) that again ended in defeat. The collective despair resulting from these wars led to a shift in the initial priority given to the apparitions as a sign of hope and as a unifying force. The atmosphere

created by the wars reflected tensions between religious and social groups rather than one of despair as expressed by Coptic interpretations of the written prophecy of the Goethe student.¹⁰⁰

Third, other attributions that merit critical assessment are the apparitions as fulfillment of prophecies from earlier apparitions or the cause of other positive developments. For instance, Lúcia dos Santos' memoirs and letters are bereft of a message for a pope given in a letter to remain sealed for fifty years; Nelson's account does not identify the source of this interpretation that Egypt would be in turmoil when the letter is unsealed and Mary will protect Egyptians.¹⁰¹ The Virgin's alleged appearance to the Lithuanian Ramute Macvyte-Matiukaite in 1962 may not necessarily point to Zeitoun alone. Since Zeitoun, there were other reported silent apparitions of Mary in Egypt: Al-Shoubra (1981, 1986), Assiut (2000) and Warraq el Haddar (2009).

Lastly, Egyptian Copts suggest that the Virgin's appearances in April 1968 set the stage for the return of a relic of St. Mark to the Coptic Orthodox Church, an act of fraternal charity by the Roman Catholic Church. However, it is worth noting that the process of reconciliation between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches began during Vatican II, years before the apparitions. The return of the evangelist's relic in 1968 was just another sign of the ongoing reconciliation between the churches.

In spite of these reservations, Zeitoun like Knock reminds the faithful to appreciate the gift of silence in which they can look beyond the messenger and her words and contemplate what these events signify for the believer and for the people of God. Zeitoun, however, was not the only serial apparition in Egypt. At al-Shoubra (1981) in Cairo, reports claim that Mary left a fullsize image carved in the arch of the church on Massarra Street, similar to her imprint on the

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, "Virgin of Zeitoun," 10.

¹⁰¹ CDF, "Message of Fatima." Lúcia does document the "three secrets" of Fátima in manuscripts (in 1941 and 1944) that were placed in the Vatican secret archives in 1957. Written much after the 1917 apparitions, they do not prophesy events in Egypt.

church gable at Knock. In 1986, she reportedly appeared again, this time at the Church of St. Demiana, in Papadoplo, al-Shoubra's poorest neighborhood. Her appearance alongside St. Demiana rekindled the faith of the Copts who were undergoing one trial after another. One can only conjecture the significance of St. Demiana martyred for her faith; was this a message for Egyptian Copts to accept their suffering in the name of Christ?¹⁰² In 2000, local residents of Assiut in Upper Egypt reported visions of the Virgin on the night of August 17 accompanied by extremely bright doves at St. Mark's Church.¹⁰³ In Warraq el-Haddar, more than 200,000 Christians and Muslims witnessed apparitions of the Virgin on the domes of the Virgin Mary and Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Church on December 11, 2009.¹⁰⁴ Why has the Virgin Mary repeatedly appeared in Egypt in the last half-century? Is Egypt an exemplification of what is transpiring globally in terms of Christian-Muslim tensions? If so, Mary's silence at Zeitoun, al-Shoubra, Assiut, and Warraq el-Haddar are open to further interpretation.

A possible interpretation of Mary bowing before the cross in Zeitoun and the presence of the Lamb at Knock is that the Virgin redirects human attention to God. Kamell writes, "Although the Virgin did not speak in Egypt, her actions and movements left an unmistakable message: 'Repent. Come back to God. Pray, pray, and pray. Build more churches.'¹⁰⁵ Therefore, this paranormal event is unprecedented with implications for the local and world church.

¹⁰² Kamell, *Lady of Light Appears in Egypt*, 96, 97, 104, 105. A 16 year-old girl named Hermene Sami who lived two blocks from St. Demiana Church was studying for her final examinations on the night of March 25, 1986 when she took a break and went to her apartment balcony to relax. At two o'clock in the morning, she claimed she saw the Virgin standing on the minaret of the Church. Shouting for joy, she awoke her parents and other tenants, who after witnessing the apparition gathered with other neighbors around the church by dawn.

¹⁰³ The Miracle Hunter, "Assiut, Egypt (2000-2001)," http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/assiut/index.html (accessed May 13, 2019). The Priests' Council in Assiut issued a declaration affirming the apparitions on October 13, 2000. The apparitions ended in January 2001.

¹⁰⁴ The Miracle Hunter, "Warraq el-Haddar (2009)," http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/warraq/index.html (accessed May 13, 2019). A full silhouette of Mary dressed in a light blue robe could be seen from a distance atop the dome between the crosses. The local Coptic bishop approved these apparitions on December 14, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Kamell, *Lady of Light*, 154-155.

4.3 Assessment: Implications of Zeitoun for Ecclesial Life

This apparition has significant import for Muslim-Christian interfaith relations in Egypt and the Middle East, and ecumenical implications for the Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. In discussing the common themes of apparitional messages in Chapter 2, one category of interpretation has to do with their inducement to evangelization, ecumenism, interreligious unity, and giving priority to the poor and the marginalized. It is in this realm of interpretation that Zeitoun makes an impact on communal relations.

4.3.1 The Virgin Affecting Evangelization through Encounter with Other Religions

When the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 1:13-14), Mary was praying with them from the vigil the night before. As pointed out in Chapter 1, her presence among the apostles and others is symbolic of her discipleship. In that room, she was the person closest to Jesus, continuing to keep the disciples together while awaiting the Spirit. In effect, she is viewed as a source of unity. After Pentecost, as the apostles went forth, the gospel message, its doctrines, and laws spread rapidly despite many challenges encountered, inaugurating a new order of justice and peace among nations and continents (Leo XIII, *Adjutricem populi* §10).¹⁰⁶

When the Mother of Light appeared in Zeitoun, reports claim that Egyptian Copts and Muslims welcomed the apparitions at a time of despair following a humiliating defeat in a war with Israel the year before. Makari argues that the defeat was unexpected and “played a critical role in the reemergence of religious sentiment in Egypt, as Egyptians felt they were being punished for their lack of faith.”¹⁰⁷ A number of writers affirm that the Virgin’s reported apparitions in Egypt had initially brought about a spirit of unity among Christians and Muslims.

¹⁰⁶ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 58.

¹⁰⁷ Makari, “Christianity and Islam,” 95, in Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 414.

For the first time, Muslims were asking questions about the Christian faith.¹⁰⁸ Palmer affirms that the increase in piety and signs of interreligious tolerance during the years of the apparitions was unprecedented.¹⁰⁹ According to Westbrook, historians of the Middle East noted increased interest in Egyptian religiosity since the apparitions, including monasticism and the prevalence of Qur’anic study groups.¹¹⁰ Open discussions of religion and missionary work, previously forbidden in public spaces, were taking place in barbershops and taverns.¹¹¹ During the apparitions, DeVincenzo writes that thousands gathered “in communal ecumenical [and interreligious] prayer vigils and religious celebrations,” marking “the first time that anyone could remember Muslims and Christians worshipping together in Egypt.”¹¹² At these gatherings, Hearden writes, Muslims and Christians stood side-by-side, reciting prayers from their own tradition. The apparitions inspired an atmosphere of increased piety that had a profound and positive influence on ethical behavior.¹¹³

Though there are ongoing tensions between the followers of the two faiths, the common reverence for the Virgin Mary has the potential to unify Muslims and Christians.¹¹⁴ This does not mean that Marian apparitions are unifying. They also have the potential to disrupt unity especially when they lead to conversions because of the following they attract.¹¹⁵

One can only speculate the reason for Mary’s silence at Zeitoun. Palmer reasons that silence was a necessary means of sustaining harmony among the seers. He writes:

¹⁰⁸ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 64.

¹⁰⁹ Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 409.

¹¹⁰ Westbrook, “Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968-1971),” 91.

¹¹¹ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 64.

¹¹² DeVincenzo, “Apparitions at Zeitoun,” 5, in Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 410.

¹¹³ Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 418.

¹¹⁴ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 54.

¹¹⁵ Westbrook, “Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968-1971),” 92. There are no reports that Copts converted to Islam during the apparitions at Zeitoun, but there are few reports of Muslim conversions to Christianity. Many Muslims offered testimonies of miraculous cures that affirm a Christian mariological understanding of Zeitoun rather than an Islamic theological interpretation. Despite a shared reverence for the Virgin, such conversions have serious ramifications with respect to Islamic law concerning apostasy.

If Our Lady were to declare herself as ‘Mother of God,’ the Muslims who do not regard Christ as God, would no longer be interested. If she referred to herself as she did at Lourdes as the ‘Immaculate Conception’ the Copts, who believe Mary was sanctified only at the time of the Annunciation, would probably reject the visions as not authentic. Whatever message Our Lady has brought can be read in her silent gestures of holding out the olive branch, of kneeling at the cross, and of blessing and encouraging her people in their bitter struggle with poverty and war.¹¹⁶

Taking up the question of Mary’s silence, Hearden writes that a verbal message might have risked favoring one group over the other and possibly aggravating existing hostilities. She speculates that there could be other possible explanations for Mary’s silence:

Perhaps she was silent in anticipation of pilgrims from other parts of the world who would witness her apparitions but spoke other languages and so could not have understood a verbal message. Or, perhaps she was using the unique power of silence to attract the attention of a noisy, distracted world. We would have to ask her to know for sure.”¹¹⁷

The Maronite Catholic priest, Joseph Mazloum, offers another speculative story concerning the Virgin’s silence. Coptic Christians frequently undertake pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Mazloum reasons that perhaps the Virgin was visiting the Copts as recompense for their inability to visit the Holy Land during the Arab-Israeli conflict when Israel closed its borders to Egypt and its allies. Kyrillos VI himself offered his own thoughts suggesting that perhaps Our Lady was reminding Egyptians that she had once dwelt in their land during a troubled period of her life and understands their plight in the current conflict.¹¹⁸

4.3.2 *Umm al-Noor*, a Unifying Symbol?

The unprecedented display of unity between Christians and Muslims during and immediately following the apparitions indicates that the phenomenon itself became a Marian symbol with the power to unify people. The inclination of both faiths to identify the luminous figure as the Virgin Mary also has to do with their respective traditions. As briefly discussed in

¹¹⁶ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 43.

¹¹⁷ Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 416, and n. 36.

¹¹⁸ Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt*, 43.

Chapter 1, both religious traditions revere Mary or Maryam though differently; in Islam, she is a prophet and messenger sent by God while Orthodox Christianity gives her deeper theological significance as the God-bearer.¹¹⁹ Quoting Nelson, Hearden confirms that the Virgin, as *Magna Mater*, symbolizes for Egyptian Christians and Muslims, “a succoring, protective mother, the great prototype of the universal human experience, who has the power to banish chaos and restore the benign shape of the world.”¹²⁰ Describing the local response to the apparitions, Nelson further affirms:

To most Egyptians the appearance of the Virgin was initially a sign of hope ... the Virgin had come to the Egyptians to restore faith in God and give hope and moral support to the defeated, perhaps even lead the Egyptians to victory over the modern-day Herods. That is, during the initial months the Virgin was seen as a collective symbol for Egyptians. The attitude of those who went to Zeitoun at this time was one organized communal supplication toward the supernatural of a people seeking divine guidance at a time when there seemed to be no visible way out of a hopeless situation.¹²¹

Though the two traditions appropriate the person of Mary and her story differently, they adhere to common principles fundamental to peaceful and respectful cohabitation and dialogue. These principles include a faith in God as the giver of hope and shaper of human destiny, God’s concern for humanity, and the acknowledgment of the bond of common human experience. The Virgin of Zeitoun, in reminding God’s people of these fundamentals, functions as a symbol of peace, unity, and hope, bringing members of Christianity and Islam together in solidarity like never witnessed before.¹²² However, can we say that the apparitions truly liberated Egyptian Christians and Muslims from communal discord?

The interreligious tolerance and harmony between Muslims and Christians attributed to the apparitions was short-lived. The continuing persecution of the Copts and the spiraling

¹¹⁹ Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 418.

¹²⁰ Nelson, “The Virgin of Zeitoun,” 9, in Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 417.

¹²¹ Nelson, “The Virgin of Zeitoun,” 8, in Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 417.

¹²² Hearden, “Ambassador for the Word,” n. 39, in Hearden, “Lessons from Zeitoun,” 417.

violence indicate that the pragmatic attempts at sustaining peaceful cohabitation between Christians and Muslims in the decades following the apparitions have been unsuccessful. Even accurate reporting of the number of Copts living in Egypt is a subject of contention. Census estimates are a political tool that further marginalizes the Copts by intentionally underreporting their numbers. The Center for Global Christianity estimated the number of Egyptian Copts at 5% in 2010. Suleiman Shafikh, who specializes in citizenship research, argues that the numbers are irrelevant. What is at stake is the just demands by Copts who are seeking full citizenship. He points out that the Ministry of Manpower reported in 2010 that Copts owned 31 percent of the national wealth. The timing behind the revelation of their numbers is to undermine their status and struggle for citizenship rights.¹²³

A study conducted during 1980-1981 found that common Eastern piety yields greater understanding between Muslims and Christians. Copts were found to have an appreciation for the Islamic faith, seeing it as enhancing their own faith. The respondents also placed emphasis on opposing secularization and forces that erode society.¹²⁴ Both Orthodox Christianity and Islam share a common mode of religious expression and language contrary to perception. Carl-Martin Edsman points out that it is possible to find traits of Islamic thought in Coptic theology and a Muslim is able to understand Christian faith quite differently when expressed as Coptic orthodoxy. However, Orthodox Copts find attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity not only impossible, but also dangerous for the church.¹²⁵ Despite these synergies and possibilities,

¹²³ Abdel Rahman Youssef, "Egyptian Copts: It's All in the Number," *Al-Akhbar*, September 30, 2012, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12728> (accessed October 12, 2018).

¹²⁴ Inga-Lill & S. Rubenson, "Kyrka och mission i Mellanöstern. Reflexioner efter 6 månaders studievistelse i Egypten (Missionsorientering 136, no. 2 (1982): 11, in "Problems Encountered by Christian Minorities in an Islamic Environment," Carl-Martin Edsman, *Temenos - Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 18 (1982): 29.

¹²⁵ Lill & Rubenson, "Kyrka och mission i Mellanöstern," 11, in Edsman, "Problems Encountered by Christian Minorities," 29.

the existing tensions between Muslims and Christians in Egypt and the Middle East suggest that the traditional tools used to effect and sustain interreligious dialogue yield marginal results.

4.3.3 Interfaith Encounter, Misconceptions, Presuppositions, New Possibilities

4.3.3.1 *Why has Interreligious Encounter Failed in Egypt?*

The absence of peaceful co-existence between Christian Copts and Muslims in Egypt and the Middle East suggests that modern methods of conflict resolution between the two faiths have been unsuccessful. Hostilities toward Copts have three root causes—Christian majority during the days of Islamic empire building posed a threat to Islam, deep resentment of Western domination over the centuries, and misconceptions that Christians and Jews were enemies of Islam.¹²⁶ More recently, the Arab Spring of 2011 and the fall of the Mubarak and Morsi regimes have compounded the volatile situation on the ground.¹²⁷

Every Egyptian president over the past 60 years aimed to satisfy his constituency no matter how sympathetic he may have been to the Coptic Church and its members. Islam restricts what is permissible in Egyptian society and politics. In the ongoing struggle between Islamists and secularists, the former have the upper hand. Zeidan affirms that, “as long as religion is perceived as the dominant component of national identity there is little space for common ground between members of the two communities. Barriers only came down this century during periods when religion was marginalized and other identities prioritized.”¹²⁸

Interreligious encounter has largely focused on shared values and principles. However, there is hesitation in addressing the issues that divide, but those are the conversations to have. Even on issues that unite like a shared reverence for Mary/Maryam, one must not assume that

¹²⁶ Zeidan, “The Copts,” 61.

¹²⁷ Nelly van Doorn-Harder, “Burning the Churches: Egypt’s Christians in the Heat of August,” *Huntington Post*, August 29, 2013, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nelly-van-doornharder/burning-the-churches-egypt_b_3831544.html (accessed October 12, 2018), in Westbrook, “Our Lady of Zeitoun (1968-1971),” 92.

¹²⁸ Zeidan, “The Copts,” 64.

what is constitutive of Christianity is also central to Islam. For instance, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Catholics ascribe to Mary a significant role as *mediatrix* in the economy of salvation. Muslims pay less attention to this passive, receptive, Godward aspect of the *mediatrix*, perhaps because, as Tim Winters suggests, they already have an image of the receptive female in the figure of Fatima.¹²⁹ Furthermore, within Islam, soteriology is without gender. Islam finds no use of a virginal archetype provided by Christianity, and therefore, rejects any role of Mary in salvation history, confining her significance to a preeminence among women who serve as models of womanhood for variant Muslim cultures.¹³⁰

4.3.3.2. *Presuppositions for Muslim-Christian Dialogue*

In predominantly Muslim Egypt, Muslim-Christian dialogue continues to be a challenge in the 21st century owing to a polemical past that perpetuated misconceptions and distorted caricatures of one side about the other. Christian mission faces enormous difficulties because its work is confused with proselytization. This is also true of the Indian context discussed in Chapter 3 where conversion equates with abandoning one's faith and culture. Furthermore, secularization has made inroads into these once-deeply religious places, offering new openings for religion in society¹³¹ and that further hinders evangelistic efforts.

How then does one approach Muslim-Christian encounter in Egypt, the Middle East, and similar contexts? Despite some weaknesses in his theoretical methodology and practical applications, Isma'il al-Faruqi's contributions to interfaith dialogue are worth exploring.¹³² Also important to this discourse are the conditions, difficulties, and risks associated with Muslim-

¹²⁹ Tim Winter, "Pulchra ut Luna: Some Reflections on the Marian Theme in Muslim-Catholic Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36, no. 3-4 (Summer-Fall 1999): 468.

¹³⁰ Winter, "Pulchra ut Luna," 468.

¹³¹ Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 90.

¹³² Charles D. Fletcher, *Muslim-Christian Engagement in the Twentieth Century: The Principles of Interfaith Dialogue and the Work of Isma'il Al-Faruqi* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 211.

Christian dialogue identified by Mohammed Talbi.¹³³ Charles Fletcher writes that al-Faruqi's presuppositions behind dialogue begin with the truth discovered in one's personal faith. One must be convinced of the truth in one's faith before venturing into dialogue.¹³⁴ Talbi points out that every religion teaches that God is Justice, Mercy and Love. This understanding can lead to a change of mentality and theological renewal in Islam like the Church experienced during Vatican II.¹³⁵ Second, mutual respect allows participants to be themselves without succumbing to pressure to modify their beliefs for the sake of dialogue.¹³⁶ Here, Talbi points out that Muslims and Christians are unequal partners because unlike Christians who through their churches have reached out to members of other faiths, Muslims have remained largely isolated.¹³⁷ A third presupposition is the freedom to embrace an idea, value, or the position taken by the other side without fear of how others might react. For al-Faruqi, freedom means both sides are free to persuade the other. A downside is that Muslims might be reticent in expressing their views because Islam views them as traitors for rejecting any tenet of the faith.¹³⁸

The acquisition of knowledge that is open to different ways of knowing is a fourth presupposition though al-Faruqi emphasized rational thought for which he was criticized because other Muslim scholars believed it necessary to go beyond rationalism in order to respond to religiously plural contexts. Doing so leads to an openness of the other's rituals and ethos of faith. This enhances dialogue by getting past the intellectual to the more emotive elements.¹³⁹ The last of al-Faruqi's presuppositions is understanding the goal of dialogue.

¹³³ Ataullah Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1997), 136.

¹³⁴ Fletcher, *Muslim-Christian Engagement*, 217.

¹³⁵ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 143.

¹³⁶ Fletcher, *Muslim-Christian Engagement*, 217.

¹³⁷ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 142.

¹³⁸ Fletcher, *Muslim-Christian Engagement*, 218.

¹³⁹ Fletcher, *Muslim-Christian Engagement*, 218-219.

Suspicion about the ulterior motives of mission or *da'wah* such as conversion may limit either side from participating in dialogue. Here al-Faruqi is criticized for calling out Christian missions as damaging to dialogical engagement while permitting Islamic *da'wah*. Instead, both sides may appreciate honest witness to personal faith and be less cynical.¹⁴⁰ Talbi, however, argues that the fear or proselytization is unfounded because Christians and Muslims are so deeply grounded in their faith that a takeover by either side is an impossibility.¹⁴¹ While most of these presuppositions are not new, alternates border on the utopian. At the minimum, if dialogue leads to mutual respect, trust, and friendship they are fruits for peaceful coexistence.

4.3.3.3 *New Possibilities for Dialogue*

Al-Faruqi's contribution to dialogue extends beyond these prescriptive dispositions. He emphasizes ethics as the common ground for the peaceful coexistence of the three Abrahamic religions without reducing Islam, Christianity, or Judaism to an ethics-based faith. His search for a shared ethics is not only a means for dialogue, but also for interfaith collaboration in the service of society. The practical application of his approach focuses on justice, concerns of poverty, economics, and ecological issues, a shared ethics that extends beyond religion and ideologies.¹⁴² From an ethical perspective, Talbi argues for the abolition of the controversial practice of identifying minorities in Islamic countries as *dhimmi*. Even though Muslim historians may project it as protecting minorities, he claims minorities think otherwise.¹⁴³ While it is difficult to enhance dialogue based on metaphysical principles, a shared ethics provides the

¹⁴⁰ Fletcher, *Muslim-Christian Engagement*, 219.

¹⁴¹ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 142.

¹⁴² Fletcher, *Muslim-Christian Engagement*, 221-222.

¹⁴³ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 143.

possibility of greater success. Though these propositions are difficult to implement, they provide a foundation on which to build while preserving the transcendent elements of faith.¹⁴⁴

In the final analysis, the principal unifying agent is the Holy Spirit. The success of dialogue depends entirely on the partners, on the grace to be hearers and responders with a positive disposition of openness and willingness by both sides. As Talbi writes, it is not an ‘art of compromise,’ but involves engaging in difficult dialogues in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. Today, various activities of the church influence and stimulate other endeavors of social concern as well as foster exchange between Christians and adherents of other religions for the wider benefit of the community.¹⁴⁵

This chapter has examined the apparitions of Zeitoun in light of Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt’s interreligious history. This history has proven vital to the understanding and appropriation of Mary’s person and story by Islam and Coptic Christianity, and for a full sociopolitical, religious, cultural contextualization of these events and their prophetic impact. While the Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches have made strides toward reconciliation and unity, the rise of pan-Islamic movements and political tensions in Egypt and the Middle East have left the interfaith unity that occurred during and immediately after the apparitions unsustainable. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce new strategies for effective interfaith dialogue. Chapter 5 is a study of another serial apparition framed by social and political crisis. The study of the apparitions at Kibeho, Rwanda, examines the experience of typical visionaries, their messages and apocalyptic visions, and their prophetic impact in propelling people toward God through reconciliation and healing.

¹⁴⁴ Fletcher, *Muslim-Christian Engagement*, 222.

¹⁴⁵ AG §10.

CHAPTER 5

Bikira Mariya w'i Kibeho, Nyina wa Jambo Our Lady of Kibeho, Mother of the Word

The apparitions at Kibeho share many common features with those at Vailankanni and Zeitoun, but according to claims, during several of her visitations here the Virgin Mary engages her visionaries in prolonged dialogue, sometimes transporting them in an ecstatic state to distant places. In these places, they witnessed scenes of enchanting beauty, or indescribable horror that some interpreters claim proved prophetic for Rwanda. This modern apparition, framed by social and political crisis, presents an opportunity to examine the experience of typical visionaries, as well as how prophetic visions propel people toward God. Seven girls (six Catholic, one Muslim) and one boy (an adherent of African traditional religion) claimed having visions of Our Lady at Kibeho, Rwanda, from 1981 to 1989.

This chapter has three sections. Prior to offering historical details of the apparitions, the first section begins with the ecclesiastical declaration concerning these apparitions and their authenticity. The second section is a historical-critical analysis of the underlying causes of the 1994 genocide, the 1995 Kibeho massacre, and their immediate aftermath. The final section assesses the implications of these apparitions for the Rwandan church, and the impact of the genocide on local and national processes of reconciliation and healing.

5.1 The Apparitions of *Bikira Mariya w'i Kibeho* 1981-1989

Historical reports claim that beginning on November 28, 1981, *Bikira Mariya w'i Kibeho* (Kinyarwanda for 'Our Lady of Kibeho') initially appeared to three young women at the teachers training college in Kibeho on separate occasions. Alphonsine Mumureke (17, Catholic) was the first visionary of Kibeho followed by Anathalie Mukamazimpaka (20, Catholic) and Marie-Claire Mukangango (21, Catholic). Thereafter, there were claims of visions of Our Lady, or Jesus,

or both by five other visionaries—Stephanie Mukamurenzi (14, Catholic), Vestine Salima (24, Muslim), Emmanuel Segastashya (15, adherent of African traditional religion), Agnes Kamagaju (22, Catholic), and Valentine Nyiramukiza (17, Catholic). These are the most renowned visionaries who claimed visions of Mary or Jesus asking them to go to Kibehe with a specific message or mission. Most of the apparitions, some of considerable duration and dialogue, took place from 1981 to 1989 with one visionary claiming visitations by the Virgin Mary to this day. For reasons of space, only the accounts of the first three visionaries are included.

After these visionaries began their given mission, a number of self-proclaimed visionaries surfaced throughout Rwanda claiming that the Virgin Mary visited them. The bishop's Commission of Enquiry comprised of theologians, physicians, and a psychiatrist, reported that there were at least 140 alleged seers.¹ Most were dismissed for fraud, or as suffering from mental illness, and though they were interviewed and investigated, their messages, whether authentic or not, were never documented. Many other alleged seers lived in remote, inaccessible parts of the country, and could not be located, and with the scarcity of resources, it was not possible to examine every case. Therefore, the Commission exercised prudence about which cases merited attention, focusing on those visionaries that seemed most credible, appeared the earliest, and were closest to Kibehe² so as not to disorient public opinion.

The Church in Rwanda and The Holy See only approved the first three of the eight visionaries. Despite this official endorsement, many Rwandans, as well as members of the Commission believed that the other five visionaries—Stephanie, Vestine, Emmanuel, Agnes, and Valentine—were visited by the Virgin Mary, Jesus, or both.³

¹ Immaculée Ilibagiza and Steve Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibehe: Mary Speaks to the World from the Heart of Africa* (New York: Hay House, 2010), 123.

² Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibehe*, 123.

³ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibehe*, 123.

5.1.1 Process of Authentication and Judgment on the Apparitions of Kibeho

On July 2, 2001, *L'Osservatore Romano* reported that The Holy See released the June 29, 2001 declaration of Bishop Augustin Misago of Gikongoro, Rwanda, on the apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Kibeho in 1982-1983.⁴ In April 1982, Bishop Jean-Baptiste Gahamanyi of the Butare diocese to which Kibeho then belonged, established a Commission of Enquiry that included medical and theological experts. Setting two important questions for the Commission—the veracity of the alleged appearances of Mary and Jesus, and the visionaries who are to be believed—the bishop approved a public devotion linked to Mary's reported appearances at Kibeho on August 15, 1988. After reviewing the spiritual fruits borne by this devotion for the Diocese of Gikongoro and the Church in Rwanda over the previous ten years, Bishop Misago read the most significant statements that govern the rest of the declaration at a Mass held at the cathedral of Gikongoro.⁵ The key points of the declaration are as follows.

It was reported that the Virgin Mary appeared at Kibeho on November 28, 1981 and in the months that followed. There is compelling evidence to approve rather than deny these apparitions, though the testimonies of only the first three visionaries—Alphonsine Mumureke, Anathalie Mukamazimpaka, and Marie-Claire Mukangango are authentic. The Virgin identified herself as *Nyina wa Jambo* (“Mother of the Word”) that is synonymous with *Umubyeyi w’Imana* (“Mother of God”). The declaration only approved these visionaries because they were the only ones on the scene at least up to June 1982 and made Kibeho known as a place of apparitions and pilgrimage. They corresponded satisfactorily to all the criteria established by the Church in the matter of private revelations. Nothing that they said or did during the apparitions is contrary to

⁴ Ignace Mboneyabo, “Declaration of the Bishop of Gikongoro, Rwanda: ‘Judgment on the apparitions of Kibeho,’” *L'Osservatore Romano*, N. 28 (11 July 2001): 8. The full text of the declaration dated 29 June 2001 is available in French and Kinyarwanda at the diocesan offices of Gikongoro.

⁵ Mboneyabo, “Judgment on the apparitions,” 8.

Christian faith and morals, and their message is in conformity with Sacred Scripture and the living Tradition of the Church. The passage of time reaffirmed the arguments in favor of the supernatural character of these visions.

The Commission considered 1982 and 1983 the decisive and most active period of the apparitions when significant events caused crowds to flock to Kibeho. During this period, the major part of the apparitions to the three visionaries occurred and the fundamental elements of the message were communicated. Nothing said or done after 1983 (including the subsequent apparitions to Alphonsine) added anything new to the message, or from a credibility standpoint. The Commission only considered public apparitions in evaluating the facts and messages where “public” means apparitions taking place in the presence of others, but not necessarily a crowd.

According to the declaration, the alleged subsequent visionaries who reported visions of Jesus or Mary or both reflected “disquieting personal situations” that reinforced existing reservations keeping ecclesiastical authorities from proposing them as points of reference.⁶

Detailed accounts of the apparitions at Kibeho are few. Casimir Ruzindaza, a priest ordained in the Kiyinda-Mityana diocese and director of Radio Maria Rwanda, offers a detailed narrative on Alphonsine, Anathalie, and Marie-Claire—limiting his work to visionaries with ecclesiastical approval. Gabriel Maindron,⁷ a French Catholic priest, offers only a brief introduction to seven of the eight visionaries and the dates of their visions, emphasizing instead details of the messages of Mary or Jesus or both as appropriate to each seer. Immaculée Ilibagiza, a Tutsi survivor of the genocide, together with Steve Irwin, co-author of *Our Lady of Kibeho: Mary Speaks to the World from the Heart of Africa*, offers a personal account of the apparitions during the

⁶ Mboneyabo, “Judgment on the apparitions,” 8.

⁷ There is a 2006 report circulating on the worldwide web that Father Gabriel Maindron (known as *Munderere*) is on the list of most wanted genocide suspects published by the Rwandan Government.

days of her childhood when she longed to go to Kibeho, but was forbidden by her father because of her tender age. She recounts the trauma of the 1994 genocide in some of her works. When she was old enough, she visited Kibeho, and later interviewed Emmanuel Segastashya, and Valentine Nyiramukiza who to this day claims she has visions of the Mother of the Word.⁸ This section relies primarily on these three sources in offering details of each visionary's Marian encounter.

5.1.2 Approved Visionaries and Their Messages

Narrative and its interpretation are two culturally important aspects of Rwandan tradition. In Rwanda, literature evolves from people's need to talk about their lives, to express themselves through narrative in a way that informs the world of their joys and sufferings. Accounts by visionaries as well as those of survivors of human tragedy constitute textual recordings that reveal the interconnection between prophecy and lived history.⁹ This subsection studies the three approved visionaries of Kibeho, their apparitions of Mary, and the messages entrusted to them. For a timeline of political and ecclesiastical events prior to, during, and after the Kibeho apparitions, see Appendix C.

5.1.2.1 ALPHONSINE MUMUREKE

Who is Alphonsine Mumureke?

Alphonsine Mumureke, a Tutsi and the first visionary at Kibeho College¹⁰ to experience an apparition of Mary, was born on March 21, 1965, the third child to her parents Thaddee

⁸ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, chapters 11-12. Ilibagiza describes her three-month ordeal hiding in Pastor Murinzi's bathroom together with five other Tutsi women in *Left to Tell: Discovering God amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (New York: Hay House, 2014). In *Led by Faith: Rising from the Ashes of the Rwandan Genocide* (New York: Hay House, 2008), she writes about surviving the genocide and finding a life worth living through faith and the healing power of forgiveness.

⁹ Mario I. Aguilar, *The Rwandan Genocide and the Call to Deepen Christianity in Africa* (Eldoret, Kenya: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1998), 2.

¹⁰ Léon D. Saur, "From Kibeho to Medjugorje: The Catholic Church and Ethno-nationalist Movements and Regimes," in *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches?* eds. Carol Rittner, John K. Roth, and Wendy Whitworth (St. Paul: Paragon, 2004), 211. The college, under the charge of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Virgin,

Gakwaya and Marie Immaculate Mukarasana who lived about 3 Km from the parish of Zaza in the Kibungo region known as Gisaka. She was baptized at age 12 on July 27, 1977 at the primary school in Zaza. According to Ruzindaza, her parents had divorced and her father remarried without providing for Alphonsine's mother and the family. The girl grew up Christian, sang in the choir 'Pueri Cantores,' and together with other children regularly attended Mass on Sundays and some weekdays when it was her choir's turn to sing. Despite family problems, Alphonsine aspired to do well for herself. She worked hard at passing the Primary Leaving Examinations so that she could advance to secondary studies and someday be a source of support to her mother. She arrived at Kibeho College two weeks after the start of the 1981-1982 academic year and so had to make up missed work while acclimating herself to a new place. Ruzindaza writes that there is nothing in her early Christian life and biography that would predispose this young girl to specially merit a supernatural visit from the Virgin.¹¹

First Apparition to Alphonsine

According to Ilibagiza and Erwin, Alphonsine's life changed forever at 12:35 p.m. on Saturday, November 28, 1981. Being her turn to serve at the college refectory that afternoon she carried out her duties responsibly, but overcome with a sense of blissful contentment and paralyzing fear.¹² As soon as she sat down to eat after serving her fellow students, she abruptly arose and hurried to an inner space of the refectory, hands wide open as if intending to embrace someone, and then falling heavily on her feet exclaiming: "Karamel!" ('I am' in Kinyarwanda), a respectful response to one in high esteem.¹³ Her eyes were fixated on an invisible person with

trained girls to become secretaries or primary school teachers and was financially dependent on the Rwandan Ministry for National Education in Kigali. Its facilities were minimal.

¹¹ Casimir Ruzindaza, *The Fascinating Story of Kibeho: Mary's Prophetic Tears in Rwanda* (Kibeho: Sanctuaire Notre Dame de Kibeho, 2013), 28-29.

¹² Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 34.

¹³ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 17. Alphonsine later recounted that she heard a voice calling her "Mwana!" (child) to which she responded "I am" in Kinyarwanda.

whom she was engaged in conversation, losing all sense of time and space. As time passed, nearly the whole school had gathered around Alphonsine out of concern thinking she had lost her mind, but she remained oblivious to what was happening around her. The school authorities connected her current state with her illness earlier that month when she went to Butare University Hospital for a checkup.¹⁴ To bring her back to her senses, the students started tapping her in an irritating manner, pinching her, obstructing her gaze, even reaching into the iris of her eyes, but she did not respond to their provocation. This continued for 15 minutes at the end of which Alphonsine emerged from her stupor praying inaudibly what seemed like three *Ave Maria* and one *Veni Creator Spiritus*. She then fell to the floor in a frightening ecstasy. Her fellow students carried her to her bed and left her there.¹⁵

Alphonsine's Account of Her Conversation with Our Lady and Her Appearance

Ruzindaza writes that when Alphonsine came out of her comatose state, she recounted that she unhesitatingly asked the lady: “Ese, mugore uri nde?” (‘Who are you, lady?’). The woman replied in proper Kinyarwanda, “Ndi Nyina wa Jambo” (‘I am the Mother of the Word’). To reconfirm what she had heard, Alphonsine asked the lady again: “Ni wowe Nyina wa Jambo?” at which the lady nodded her head in affirmation.¹⁶ *Nyina wa Jambo* is synonymous with *Umubyeyi w’Imana* which is Kinyarwanda for ‘Mother of God.’ Alphonsine described the lady emerging from a cloud as the most beautiful she had ever beheld, floating between the floor and ceiling in a pool of shimmering light. She wore a flowing, seamless white dress with a white veil covering her hair but not her face. Her hands were joined as if in prayer with her slender fingers pointing toward heaven. The majestic Lady was barefooted just as Rwandan villagers would be. The

¹⁴ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 29-30

¹⁵ A. Misago, *Op. cit.*, 23, in Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 18-19.

¹⁶ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 21.

figure emanated so much warmth that Alphonsine's fear was replaced with joy.¹⁷ She was convinced that she had seen and conversed with the Virgin Mary, even though the lady did not appear like the pictures and statues she had seen of her. Her skin was so flawless that it was difficult to determine its color. Her complexion was closer to that of Rwandese women, but not dark. She could be categorized as neither black nor white, but somewhere in-between.¹⁸

The Second and Third Apparitions

Alphonsine persevered in prayer for inner peace, entrusting herself to God and Mary. The night of the first apparition, she reported a second encounter with Nyina wa Jambo who questioned why people had doubts about her coming to Kibeho. Mary promised the young visionary that she would come see her regularly, the next visit being the following day, November 29, at the same time as the first visit, but in her dormitory, not the refectory. As she promised, the Mother of the Word appeared to Alphonsine a third time in two days, this time observed only by Sister Blandine, one of the Sisters-in-charge, and Marie-Claire who were by chance passing Alphonsine's dormitory. Between November 28 and the Christmas holidays of 1981, Alphonsine had nine apparitions, with each vision giving her a new source of strength and confidence. The relationship between Alphonsine and the Virgin became familial and informal, giving critics reason to ridicule the apparitions, and to doubt what was transpiring.¹⁹

Our Lady's Message to the World through Alphonsine

The essence of Mary's message to Alphonsine for the world was to have faith in God who in Jesus Christ will return soon. Mary wanted believers to reflect on his return and prepare their souls for this. The world is in a state of moral degradation, filled with so much hatred and sin.

¹⁷ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 35-36.

¹⁸ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 27.

¹⁹ It is only from subsequent accounts of apparitions to Anathalie and Marie-Claire that these critics learn that the Virgin Mary also treated them in an informal and familiar manner.

Mary sent a warning to the world through Alphonsine that people needed to pray with sincerity. By praying the Rosary every day, they express their love for Mary and Jesus. She wanted people to repent and turn to God. By the holidays, a strong prayer group that included the Sisters, teachers, students, and locals from the neighborhood evolved, all wanting to recite the Rosary with Alphonsine. During their meetings, they offered personal testimonies about how the apparitions helped their faith and nourished their spiritual life.²⁰

What Alphonsine did not reveal at the time was the important messages for the Hutu president and government officials of Rwanda about their policies of discrimination against the Tutsi and about letting those forced into exile to return home. She was “to deliver the messages with love—as well as to encourage the leaders to pray the Rosary every day, to love their fellow humans, turn their hearts toward God’s love, and follow the Lord’s commandments.”²¹

Transforming the Site of the Apparitions

As word of the apparitions spread, thousands of pilgrims descended upon Kibeho. Artists producing documentaries on the apparitions expressed the need to make the place more receptive and accommodating. The Sisters transformed the dormitory where most of the apparitions took place into a chapel. With the exception of Alphonsine’s bed, they removed all other items. Today the chapel is a revered place where pilgrims pray and meditate for hours.²²

5.1.2.2 ANATHALIE MUKAMAZIMPAKA

Who is Anathalie Mukamazimpaka?

Unlike Alphonsine, Anathalie Mukamazimpaka, the second visionary at Kibeho College, is of Hutu descent. She was from the Gikongoro region where the school is located. According to

²⁰ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 42.

²¹ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 51-52.

²² Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 49.

Maindron, she was born to Laurent Ngango and Gaudence Kabaziga in the Mubuga district of Rwanda in 1964, baptized on February 2, 1968 at age 4, and confirmed on August 23, 1979. Anathalie was the fourth of eight children. She commanded the respect of her peers, had a calm nature, and exemplified herself as a person of prayer, as deeply spiritual, and of good moral standing. At the time of the apparitions in 1981-1982, she had just one year left to finish her course as a primary teacher.²³ She completed four years of secondary education, but interrupted her studies at the request of Our Lady. She became involved in the Legion of Mary and the Charismatic Renewal run by the Sisters of Kibeho College.²⁴

First Apparition of the Mother of the Word to Anathalie

Anathalie reported her first apparition of Mary on January 12, 1982. She continued to have apparitions of Mary and Jesus until December 3, 1983.²⁵ On January 12, around 7:00 p.m. after supper when Anathalie was in the former dormitory-turned-chapel and the other students were in recreation or in classrooms preparing for night studies, she recited the Rosary with a group of students. Suddenly she was overcome with fear and began shivering, falling into a deep sleep in which she was transported far off from Kibeho. When she arrived at a place that was beautiful and green, she heard a voice speak to her in Kinyarwanda. During a later interrogation by the Commission, Anathalie explained that Mary was saddened that people had hardened their hearts and failed to pay attention to her salvific message. She chose Anathalie to take on suffering and to consecrate her life for the forgiveness of people's sins. The voice asked her to bring a book that was in the corner of the chapel and to read pages 1 to 14. She knew that there

²³ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 80-81; Gabriel Maindron, *The Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho, Rwanda: A Prophecy Fulfilled* (South Godstone: Marian Spring Centre, 1996), 16.

²⁴ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 16.

²⁵ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 16.

was no book in the chapel, but when she turned around, she saw one entitled *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* by Thomas Kempis.²⁶ Anathalie dwelt on the first page for a while reading the words:

This is the greatest wisdom—to seek the Kingdom of heaven through contempt of the world. It is vanity, therefore, to seek and trust in riches that perish. It is vanity also to court honor and to be puffed up with pride. It is vanity to follow the lust of the body and to desire things for which severe punishment later must come. It is vanity to wish for long life and to care little about a well-spent life. It is vanity to be concerned with the present only and not to make provision for things to come. It is vanity to love what passes quickly and not to look ahead where eternal joy abides.²⁷

Throughout this apparition, Anathalie only followed instructions from Mary without dialogue.

Subsequent Encounters with the Mother of God

Anathalie later reported that she experienced many more visitations from Mary, but refused to characterize them as apparitions like those experienced by Alphonsine. Unlike Alphonsine, Anathalie did not seem ready to divulge what Mary told her, but each visit lessened her fear, making her more joyful and confident.²⁸ On March 2, 1982, Anathalie reported her fourth apparition when for the first time observers were able to follow the dialogue she had with the Virgin. Our Lady revealed herself as *Umubyeyi w’Imana*, meaning “The Mother of God” which Mary is said to have told Anathalie is the same as *Nyina wa Jambo*.²⁹

Messages of the Blessed Mother to Anathalie

The messages she received from Our Lady³⁰ led Anathalie to advocate the need for prayer, fasting, recitation of the Rosary, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. She emphasized the virtues of charity, humility, and openness to God.³¹ Anathalie was to pray and offer her personal suffering for the forgiveness of others’ sins for the salvation of the world (vicarious suffering).

²⁶ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibehe*, 72-74.

²⁷ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibehe*, 74-75.

²⁸ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibehe*, 81.

²⁹ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibehe*, 82.

³⁰ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibehe*. See pp. 35-38 for reported dialogues between the Virgin Mary and Anathalie during their encounters.

³¹ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibehe*, 17.

She was to dedicate herself to contemplative prayer and meditation with trust in God, and with sincerity, patience, and perseverance. On March 13, 1982, Mary reportedly asked Anathalie to pray without ceasing, a request that affected her dramatically. She understood this as a mission from God far different from her personal plans of becoming a primary school teacher. Reflecting on her task, she knew she was not alone and completely suspended her studies by May 1982.³²

Between January and April 1982, Anathalie reported ten apparitions with messages that centered on salvific suffering. Ruzindaza writes, “She had learnt that suffering can positively work on somebody’s conscience. It can awaken and sustain one’s total trust in God enabling abandonment of self to God. Suffering can be a source of one’s reunion with God; understanding the suffering represented by the cross is essential to the spiritual life of a believer.”³³ Subsequent apparitions reinforced this theme. On July 6, 1982, Anathalie was instructed to remain in Kibeho until Mary told her otherwise.³⁴

A Title for Anathalie

Mary continued to appear to Anathalie many times, both privately and publicly. On one occasion, she called the young visionary “Mother of Believers” which Anathalie felt was an appellation befitting Mary herself. On August 28, 1982, the Virgin explained to her the reason why she had to stop her studies, and why she should accept the title—to remind herself of the need to pray constantly and to suffer in order to save the world from its sinfulness. Mary stressed that Anathalie should get used to this title, repeating it during her apparitions on September 11 and 15, October 9 and 30, and on November 27, 1982.³⁵

³² Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 83-85.

³³ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 85.

³⁴ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 85-86.

³⁵ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 93-95. The title caused problems for Anathalie with the Commission because according to *Lumen gentium*, chapter 8, and the teaching of the Church, this appellation is reserved for Mary. Anathalie explained to the Commission that she does not replace the Mother of all of the Faithful, that Mary’s bestowal of this title was symbolic to emphasize her collaboration in Mary’s spiritual Motherhood. The

5.1.2.3 MARIE-CLAIRE MUKANGANGO

Who is Marie-Claire Mukangango?

The fourth of eight children, Marie-Claire Mukangango was born into a Hutu family in 1961 in the Musebeya district of Rwanda. At Kibeho College, she developed the reputation of being outgoing and outspoken to the point of rudeness. She was loud, wild, boisterous, and exhibited disruptive behavior inside and outside the classroom. She completed her Teacher's Diploma at Kibeho College, and began teaching in a local primary school in September 1983.³⁶

According to Ilibagiza and Erwin, Marie-Claire loved Mary and prayed to her, but was not particularly religious. She did not attend Mass regularly nor was she a member of prayer groups. Her affection for Mary made her determined to expose what she considered Alphonsine's deception, often embarrassing and humiliating the latter in public. She rallied together other Hutu students to denounce Alphonsine as a "false" visionary, physically abusing her when in a trance. The girls yanked Alphonsine's hair, bent her fingers backward, pinched her skin, screamed into her ears, and tossed rosaries ordering her to bless the beads, but to no avail; Alphonsine neither blinked nor flinched despite the verbal and physical abuse.³⁷ Marie-Claire was convinced that the apparitions to the visionaries were a sign of their intellectual weakness and bad academic performance, or that neighbors back home were sending them bad spirits.³⁸

Apparitions of Our Lady to Marie-Claire

Ruzindaza affirms that if anyone was still skeptical that the Virgin Mary had been appearing in Kibeho, Marie-Claire's first reported apparition on March 2, 1982 dispelled those

Commission concluded that there was nothing contrary to the teaching of the Church in Anathalie's explanation that implicates her in her participation in Mary's spiritual Motherhood.

³⁶ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 17.

³⁷ Immaculée Ilibagiza and Steve Erwin, *The Boy Who Met Jesus: Segatashya of Kibeho* (New York: Hay House, 2011), 25-26.

³⁸ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 113.

doubts.³⁹ On that day, when Sister Blandine was conducting a singing class, Anathalie was sitting behind Marie-Claire. Suddenly, Anathalie stood up, approached the Sister and asked for permission to go to the dormitory. The Sister realized that it was probably time for another visitation and gave the girl permission. Curious, Sister Blandine invited the class to follow her so that they may pray with Anathalie who was already in ecstasy when they reached the dormitory.

Marie-Claire who was with the group suddenly experienced an intense fear that made her gasp for air. Slowly her fear gave way to joy when she heard a calm female voice calling her by name. The Virgin asked Marie-Claire to work on her morality, and to sing a common song with the verse in Matthew 5:10: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Marie-Claire did not want to sing, so Mary asked her to tell someone else to do it. She was surprised to find Anathalie close to her, fidgeting with rosaries that she was offering the Virgin for blessing following which she broke into the song and all, including Marie-Claire, joined in. This joint apparition lasted 2 hours 30 minutes.⁴⁰ After this encounter, Marie-Claire was convinced that the voice she heard was that of the Virgin. She was the only visionary never to ask the Virgin to identify herself because the woman who spoke of Jesus as her Beloved Son could be none other than Mary. The next day, she heard the same voice and experienced the same fear followed by joy.⁴¹

No one associated Marie-Claire with the Virgin Mary. When it became clear that she too was a visionary of the Blessed Mother, nobody thought it necessary to carry out any tests on her. Seeing Marie-Claire and Anathalie kneeling in a joint apparition on March 2, 1982 (and again on

³⁹ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 129-30. Ruzindaza notes that on March 1, Marie-Claire had a frightening experience with two dark unfriendly figures before her first apparition the following day. Mary enlightened her that this experience was needed to enable her to pray for the grace of patience. The significance of the vision of dark figures is not clear despite the Virgin Mary's explanation.

⁴⁰ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 118-22.

⁴¹ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 131.

March 6) marked a turning point in the serial public apparitions at Kibeho. Students, teachers, and sisters were surprised at the internal transformation that Marie-Claire had undergone.⁴²

Mission and Messages Given to Marie-Claire

Marie-Claire's Marian mission was to emphasize repentance. She advocated meditation on the Passion of Christ and the sufferings of his Blessed Mother. She was to make known the Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady.⁴³ On March 3, 1982, the Virgin Mary asked Marie-Claire if she knew the Rosary of Seven Sorrows,⁴⁴ which the latter had never heard of. On March 6, in another joint apparition with Alphonsine, Marie-Claire fell to her knees from a sitting position. She heard the tender, motherly voice emerging from a cloud. Slowly she saw a woman dressed in white with a veil covering her head. Marie-Claire later said that there were no words to describe the woman's beauty. She was young, but neither white nor black. The Virgin encouraged Marie-Claire to recite the Rosary of Seven Sorrows⁴⁵ with her, and recommended that she do so at least two times a week. She had to inform the headmistress of the college that Our Lady wanted the Rosary recited regularly at school, and that the parish priest of Kibeho is to do the same. While the headmistress heeded the message, the parish priest paid no attention to it.⁴⁶

⁴² Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 132.

⁴³ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 17.

⁴⁴ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 135. The Rosary of Seven Sorrows devotion traces back to the 'Servite Order' in the 16th century. Originally known as the Chaplet of Seven Sorrows, or the 'Servite Rosary,' it is recited by meditating on the Seven Sorrows of Mary. It consists of a ring of seven groups of seven beads each separated by a small bead depicting one of the Sorrows. Another three beads and a medal are attached to the ring before the first Sorrow; these beads of prayer honor Mary's tears before beginning the chaplet. Also once known as the "Seven Swords Rosary" in reference to Simeon's prophecy, it was approved through the indulgences granted by Benedict XII and Clement XIII. The beads are typically of black wood or some other black material to signify sorrow.

⁴⁵ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 135. The Rosary of Seven Sorrows was not foreign to Rwanda. Mother Therese Kamugisha, the first African superior (1953 – 1964) of the Congregation of the Benedikira used to recite the Rosary and teach it to those who showed interest.

⁴⁶ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 124-29, 133. The Virgin is believed to have told Marie-Claire that the usual Rosary and the one of Seven Sorrows are complementary, but the latter makes one meditate and live the Sorrows of Mary that are ultimately related to the Sorrows of Jesus Christ from his birth to his death on the cross.

5.1.3 The Message of Kibeho

Marie-Claire reported that when the Blessed Mother appeared to her on April 24, 1982, the latter told her that people did not understand why she would come to a poor country like Rwanda. Mary replied that she had come here precisely because Rwanda was materially impoverished, but spiritually rich. Her people, particularly those in Kibeho, were humble and demonstrated tremendous love for Jesus and his Mother. Her reported appearances at Kibeho affirmed the Virgin's preferential option for the poor, but her message was not for Kibeho, or the diocese of Butare, or Rwanda, or Africa alone. To Marie-Claire she said, "I have come to speak to all of God's children the world over" (March 27, 1982), and "that I will accompany them to the end of their days" (July 21, 1984).⁴⁷ It was the wish of *Nyina wa Jambo* that Rwanda and its impoverished may show the world the way to the truth. Given the dire conditions of poverty in Rwanda, it is the poor who can identify the truth of what is wrong in the world and what ought to change. One of the important lessons that these three visionaries teach contemporary Christians is that Mary often approached them both as Mother and friend. The underlying message is that women and men must not fear to take Mary as their model of faith.⁴⁸

5.1.4 Preserving the Memory

The 'Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows' is the name given to the sanctuary at Kibeho, fulfilling what Bishop Gahamanyi anticipated when the foundation stone was laid on November 28, 1992, eleven years after the first apparition to Alphonsine. The bishop desired "that Kibeho become a place of pilgrimage and of encounter for all who seek Christ and who come there to pray, a fundamental center of conversion, of reparation for the sins of the world and of

⁴⁷ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 66.

⁴⁸ Stefano de Fiores, *Affidamento, in Maria*, in Nuovissimo Dizionario, Vol. I, 1-20, in Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 58. Among the many saints who have lived as friends of the Blessed Virgin are Jean Vianney Damascene, Ignatius of Loyola, Louis Grignion de Montfort, Maximilian Kolbe, Padre Pio, Paul VI, and John Paul II.

reconciliation, a point of meeting for ‘all who were dispersed,’ as for those who aspire to the values of compassion and fraternity without borders, a fundamental center that recalls the Gospel of the Cross.”⁴⁹ In a March 25, 2003 agreement between the Diocese of Gikongoro and the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, the shrine was entrusted to the rectorate of the Pallotine Fathers, with the first team of Pallotines arriving in Kibeho on August 31 that year.⁵⁰

The feast day of Our Lady of Kibeho is November 28 each year, on the anniversary of the first apparition to Alphonsine in the refectory of Kibeho College.

Today, Kibeho is alive with pilgrims who show the same fervor and passion that attracted hundreds of thousands of Rwandans to this rustic town during the apparitions in the 1980s. As they approach Kibeho they are seen singing or chanting, or simply happy to come to the end of their long journey.⁵¹ They come from across Africa, but mainly from Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, and as far as Europe and America.⁵² A local congregation, the Benebikira Sisters, opened a guesthouse to serve pilgrims in the center of Kibeho.⁵³ For pilgrims, the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows is a converging point of two different memories—the joy of the apparitions and the tragedy of the genocide and the Kibeho massacre that followed. People who make the pilgrimage speak of the love and compassion the Virgin Mary represents and they want to honor her through their physical sacrifice. Others remember those who lost their lives in 1994 and 1995, and making the pilgrimage offers some semblance of closure. The reminder of the genocide looms large in Kibeho and Rwanda, and the presence of the small statue of the Virgin

⁴⁹ Mboneyabo, “Judgment on the apparitions,” 8. Quoted in the Declaration of Bishop Augustin Misago.

⁵⁰ Kibeho Sanctuary, <http://kibeho-sanctuary.com/index.php/en/introduction/pastoral-services> (accessed November 28, 2018).

⁵¹ Tobias Hewitt, “Mother of the Word offers joy and closure,” *The Tablet*, January 28, 2017.

⁵² Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 181.

⁵³ Russell Byrnes, “Sorrow and Joy,” *The Tablet*, June 5, 2010.

encircled by rows of flat benches radiating outward in front of the shrine serves as a reminder that such a tragedy should never happen again.⁵⁴

Outside Kibeho, Rwanda, and Africa, the memory of the apparitions is kept alive through documentary films, books, and plays. One of the acclaimed plays by American Theater is the production “Our Lady of Kibeho” by Katori Hall.⁵⁵ Though it took ten years, Hollywood, too sought to preserve the memory of the genocide with the making of *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Sometimes in April* (2005). These and other films, Des Forges writes, “greatly increased widespread realization of the horror that had taken the lives of more than half a million Tutsi” leaving audiences “wondering how it was possible for genocide to occur in full public view at the end of the twentieth century, and why no action had been taken to halt the broadcasts that were promoting the worst of all crimes.”⁵⁶

5.1.5 The Horrific Events of 1994-1995

5.1.5.1 *The 1994 Rwandan Genocide*

It is widely reported that President Juvénal Habyarimana’s assassination on April 6, 1994 was the catalyst for the civil war and the genocide that ensued. During the violence, Christians mercilessly butchered each other resulting in the deaths of more than three quarter of a million Rwandans in a 100-day period beginning April 7, 1994. The genocide was not simply a matter of political upheaval, but a calculated systematic extermination of an ethnic group in which there were foreign and domestic actors. Christian men and women in each category—laity, clergy, and

⁵⁴ Hewitt, “Mother of the Word offers joy and closure.”

⁵⁵ Katori Hall, “Our Lady of Kibeho,” *American Theater* 32, no. 2 (February 2015): 65, 68-91. See also *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color: An Anthology*, Roberta Uno (New York: Routledge, 2018), 237-282.

⁵⁶ Alison des Forges, “Call to genocide: radio in Rwanda, 1994,” *The International Research Development Centre*, n.d., https://web.archive.org/web/20100210180655/http://www.idrc.ca:80/rwandagenocide/ev-108178-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html (accessed November 26, 2018).

religious—as well as children were involved in violence and killing.⁵⁷ As an international audience watched the atrocities in this vastly Christian country, many questioned why was this happening, and how could such killings take place in places of prayer, education, and care. The next section examines the underlying causes to provide some answers to these questions.

Gérard Prunier writes that it is only possible to estimate the number of Rwandans killed during the conflict in large part because of the perverse game the political actors—the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the NGOs, the UN, and the interim government—played with each other and the media.⁵⁸ From the first estimate of 100,000 killed by the American NGO Human Rights Watch on April 24, 1994, the casualty count from different parts of the country kept rising by the thousands every few days. Slain bodies of Tutsi as well as Hutu, were picked up by garbage trucks, buried locally, or seen floating down rivers into neighboring Uganda. Reports on the estimated dead by the RPF and the UN conflicted.⁵⁹ Prunier claims that a prudent way to come close to the real figure is to begin with the Rwandese Census of 1991, a reliable source because unlike other African countries, Rwanda is small, densely populated with a good communication network and civil service at the time. Using the census as a starting point, the approximate death toll of the genocide is in the range of 800,000 to 850,000 or a loss of 11% of the population, likely one of the highest in history due to non-natural causes.⁶⁰

5.1.5.2 *The 1995 Kibeho Massacre*

By the end of the genocide in July 1994, the RPF led by the Tutsi leader, Paul Kagame, seized power. Hutu perpetrators of genocidal crimes sought refuge in camps of which Kibeho was the largest in Rwanda, housing 90,000 to 120,000 internally displaced persons. Residents of

⁵⁷ Aguilar, *Rwandan Genocide*, 3-4.

⁵⁸ Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 1998), 261.

⁵⁹ Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, 262-263.

⁶⁰ Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, 263-265.

the camp were provided bare necessities. Susan Thomson writes, “Water was in short supply; sanitation facilities absent. Many Kibeho inhabitants displayed evidence of marasmus, with swollen bellies indicative of the first stages of malnutrition. Infectious disease was rife; cholera, diarrhea, dysentery and malaria rampant.”⁶¹

In an attempt to restore some sense of normality, the RPF government tried to disperse camp occupants. At night on Friday, April 21, 1995 the government closed all roads leading to and out of Kibeho. Thomson estimates that a hundred thousand Hutu refugees were herded out of the camp. Some walked to Butare, others to Burundi for safety. At noon on April 22, the RPF used gunfire to force the remaining refugees out of Kibeho camp.⁶² According to one report, Hutu militiamen, rather than risk arrest, used women and children as human shields. In the panic and stampede that followed approximately 4,050 Hutu perished. The two million Hutu refugees living in camps in Zaire and Tanzania became suspicious of returning to Rwanda fearing the Tutsi-led RPF government would avenge the atrocities of 1994.⁶³

In the aftermath of the genocide, there were efforts aimed at local and national reconciliation. The Kibeho massacre was a setback to these efforts. Thomson states that Rwandan scholars concur that the RPF controlled the massacre, and the information flow of what happened and to whom, a pattern it repeated when it attacked Zaire in 1996.⁶⁴ It was the government’s way of holding all Hutu accountable for the genocide regardless of actual guilt or innocence.⁶⁵ Internationally, donors like the European Union suspended direct aid pending a full independent investigation that did not happen. The US and the UK did not question the RPF

⁶¹ Susan Thomson, *Rwanda: From Genocide to Precarious Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 88.

⁶² Thomson, *Rwanda*, 88-91.

⁶³ *The Economist*, “From awful to worse: Rwanda,” April 29, 1995, 50+. The number dead at Kibeho camp was revised downward with the RPF declaring 338. According to Thomson (*Rwanda*, 91) the number is between 1,000 and 4,000.

⁶⁴ Thomson, *Rwanda*, 93.

⁶⁵ Johan Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival, and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 160-170, in Thomson, *Rwanda*, 94.

explanation and failed to express outrage. The lack of response by the international community encouraged the RPF to control the police and the judiciary ensuring no arrests or punishments for its crimes. Speaking out about the massacre and other crimes led to repression, leaving ordinary Rwandans with feelings of isolation and helplessness, anger and desperation.⁶⁶

5.1.6 Kibeho and the Alleged Marian Apparitions at Medjugorje

While the apparitions were taking place at Kibeho, several reports and books claim that the Blessed Virgin was appearing to another set of young visionaries at Medjugorje⁶⁷ in the Marxist country of the former Yugoslavia. Despite their contextual differences, Kibeho bears striking similarities with the Croatian event in the following respects. Both are serial apparitions that began in the same year, 1981, Medjugorje on June 24 and Kibeho on November 28, with both carrying urgent messages of love, conversion, prayer, and spiritual renewal. In both cases, the number of key visionaries was approximately the same (6-8) and in the teenage to young adult age range. As observed with Kibeho, the Virgin Mary directs and guides the visionary on each visit. Maindron writes that she points out their flaws, but encourages them to use their human talents forming them into a composite, competent group equipped to propagate her message. In a particular way, these visits to individual visionaries are private in that the Virgin is visible only to the seer, but in a general sense, they are also collective because both at Medjugorje and Kibeho, the seers see each other regularly.⁶⁸ Though the visionaries are each

⁶⁶ Thomson, *Rwanda*, 93-94. Also see Tharcisse Gatwa, "Resisting Democracy in Rwanda: Genocide and Reconciliation," *Reformed World* 48, no. 4 (1998): 199.

⁶⁷ The Church applies the 1991 Zadar Declaration as its current official position with respect to the alleged apparitions at Medjugorje that, based on studies conducted so far they cannot be established as supernatural (*non constat de supernaturalitate*). Following this declaration there are three possible decisions the church can make: not worthy of belief, nothing contrary to the faith, or approved. This is neither a negative nor a positive statement, but leaves open the possibility of further investigation. For details, see Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina (1981), http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/unapproved_apparitions/medjugorje/index.html (accessed February 26, 2019).

⁶⁸ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 6-7.

accorded private visits, any coherence between the actions and messages relayed by them is without any identifiable, sociological link⁶⁹ and comes not from within themselves, but according to Maindron, from a source exterior to their direct control.⁷⁰ Finally, these two apparitions, according to Léon Saur, occurred in societies that were ethnically divided and experiencing political, economic, and social upheaval with uncertainty about their futures.⁷¹ Both take place before grave human tragedies in their respective countries.

By contrast, the two events differ in frequency and duration. While apparitions at Medjugorje occur daily, are very short in duration (an average of about a minute during 1984) and private, those at Kibeho are spaced by varying intervals of time, are of lengthy duration, and occur in public with the Virgin only visible to the individual seer. During the actual events, the Medjugorje visionaries appeared relaxed and natural during their moments of ecstasy at the end of which they emerged ready to engage the ordinary world and to rejoin the congregation in prayer. At Kibeho, on the other hand, the visionaries seemed to be in a state of deep trance at the end of which they collapsed or fell forward without sustaining injury. They required an interval of time before reconnecting with the natural order.⁷²

There are many parallels in the reported messages of the Mother of the Word at Kibeho, and the Queen of Peace at Medjugorje. At Kibeho, Mary pleaded with her children to pray, fast, do penance, convert their hearts, and return to God. To Marie-Claire, she repeated three times: “Repent! Repent! Repent!” At separate appearances to young Yugoslavians in Medjugorje, she said, “I have come to tell the world: God is Truth! He exists! In him is true happiness and abundance of life!” and “I am the Queen of Peace. Be reconciled!” The Virgin Mother’s messages

⁶⁹ This means that the visionaries did not make up their own messages or behave differently based on prior knowledge of certain events.

⁷⁰ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 7.

⁷¹ Saur, “From Kibeho to Medjugorje,” in Rittner et al., *Genocide in Rwanda*, 218-219.

⁷² Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 7.

carried warnings for the world if people did not pay attention to her appeals. Ivanka Ivanovic claimed having a vision in which people were killed in the thousands. During her separate appearances to Alphonsine, Anathalie, and Marie-Claire on August 19, 1982, each visionary was shown scenes of suffering and carnage of apocalyptic proportions. During the visions that lasted for 8 hours, the Virgin appeared upset and weeping. The horrific scenes terrified the visionaries whose reaction bewildered the crowds that had gathered in Kibeho. In the vision, Maindron's account states that the seers saw people killing each other, bodies mutilated and lying abandoned, decapitated heads, burning trees, a river red with blood, and an abyss of "monsters."⁷³ In an ominous parallel, when Our Lady reportedly appeared to Ivanka Ivanovic on June 25, 1993 (the twelfth anniversary of the Medjugorje apparitions), the latter was shown similar prophetic scenes. Ivanka reported that Mary wept as she said, "These are things which will happen soon, and concern the whole world!" In 1995, Sister Emmanuel of the Beatitudes Community in Medjugorje asked Ivanka if the scenes she was shown in 1993 corresponded to what happened in Rwanda. Ivanka confirmed that in those visions she saw the massacre of Rwandans, scenes of destruction and devastation that Satan would soon bring about. Maindron states that Ivanka later interpreted these events as a sign and a warning to humanity that heeding the Virgin's appeals for prayer and fasting could have prevented these tragedies.⁷⁴ The assessment that concludes this section addresses the issue with attributing the genocide to these apparitions.

5.1.7 What happened to the Kibeho Visionaries?

The eight visionaries of Kibeho followed the model of faith exemplified by the discipleship of *Nyina wa Jambo*. They carried out the mission entrusted to them, evangelizing the

⁷³ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 98.

⁷⁴ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 98.

message of Kibeho wherever the Spirit led them. What happened to these seers of the Mother of the Word? Alphonsine Mumureke completed her studies at Kibeho College. The Diocese of Butare employed her as a secretary and stenographer at its Service Center for Catholic Education. In 1994, she fled the genocide and landed in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. In June 2003, she entered the monastery of the Poor Claires in Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire. When she completed her profession, she took the name "Alphonsine of the Glorious Cross."⁷⁵

Anathalie Mukamazimpaka escaped the genocide by fleeing to Bukavu in the former Zaire with many other refugees. Initially, she stayed at the monastery of the Trappistines of the Abbey of Our Lady of Charity and later with the Daughters of Mary Queen of Apostles. From there she transferred to Nairobi for urgent medical care. In December 1996, she returned to her home in Rwanda after being away for two years. She continues her work for the sanctuary at Kibeho, praying with pilgrims and assisting them in their needs.⁷⁶

Marie-Claire Mukangango, the third approved visionary, completed her Teacher's Diploma at Kibeho College in July 1983 and obtained her first teaching assignment at her home parish in September 1983 and then in Kigali from September 1987. She married Elie Ntabadahiga on August 22, 1987. Unfortunately, the 1994 genocide caught them off-guard. Witnesses claim that Marie-Claire was likely killed when she found her kidnapped husband and tried to defend him, and along with others, was taken to an unknown destination. The exact date or circumstances of their deaths is unknown.⁷⁷

Of the visionaries for whom there is no ecclesiastical decision, Emmanuel Segastashya continued the missionary work entrusted to him by Jesus through 1994 when, like Marie-Claire,

⁷⁵ Kibeho Sanctuary, "The Visionaries," <http://kibeho-sanctuary.com/index.php/en/apparitions/visionaries> (accessed November 28, 2018)

⁷⁶ "The Visionaries," Kibeho Sanctuary website.

⁷⁷ "The Visionaries," Kibeho Sanctuary website.

he became a victim of the genocide. Stephanie Mukamurenzi disappeared during the genocide.⁷⁸ Vestine Salima survived the genocide but later became ill and passed away.⁷⁹ Agnes Kamagaju and Valentine Nyiramukiza survived the genocide. Both continue their work of evangelizing the message of Kibeho. Reports claim that Agnes still receives visitations from Jesus while Valentine receives apparitions of Mary at least once a year,⁸⁰ the most recent being May 15, 2018.

5.1.8 Assessment of the Judgment on the Kibeho Apparitions

The declaration on the Kibeho apparitions points out two inconsistencies in the way the Church approves such events. While the judgment on the apparitions did outline why the authentication process favored the first three visionaries, it left ambiguous the status of the other five visionaries. All five visionaries had their first apparitions in 1982, though in some cases, the initial visions were private and later followed by public apparitions.

Between May 25, 1982 and December 15, 1982, Stephanie reported 15 apparitions of Mary with messages of humility, repentance, conversion, mortification, and sincere prayer.⁸¹ Though Vestine reported her first Marian vision on December 15, 1982, she claimed private revelations since 1980.⁸² Her last reported vision was Christmas Eve 1983. After her first public apparition witnessed by thousands of pilgrims at Kibeho, her reputation as a visionary, missionary, and preacher spread rapidly.⁸³ Her preaching was biblical and evangelical in content.⁸⁴

On July 2, 1982, while tending a herd of cows, Emmanuel reported an apparition of Jesus who told him to go to Kibeho to deliver a message of his imminent return to all people.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 175.

⁷⁹ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 177.

⁸⁰ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, chapter 11, 176.

⁸¹ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 17, 45. See pp. 45-46 for extracts of conversations of Stephanie and Our Lady from Father Rwagema's tapes; Ilibagiza, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 119.

⁸² Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 17.

⁸³ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, 111.

⁸⁴ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 47.

⁸⁵ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibeho*, 58.

According to Emmanuel, Jesus taught him the Sign of the Cross, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Rosary, and gave him a message for the world. He learned the meaning of many biblical stories. Initially he was accused him of blasphemy, but those who heard him were soon astonished at his ability to learn these prayers given his illiteracy. They were surprised at his newly gained knowledge of charity, sin, the Sacrament of Penance, Christ's Parousia, and the Last Judgment.⁸⁶ He answered questions with wisdom, and attributed to Jesus everything he learned. Ilibagiza reported that members of the Commission were amazed at Emmanuel's knowledge of the Bible.⁸⁷ He was baptized and confirmed in 1983, and his parents the following year. Most of Emmanuel's visions were of Jesus, but he also claimed visions of Mary.⁸⁸

Valentine reported her first vision of Mary on May 12, 1982⁸⁹ while in a church in Mubuga, and then again a few days later at home when Mary asked her to go to Kibehe and join the other visionaries. She asked Valentine to pray the Rosary of Seven Sorrows twice a day for the rest of her life. She wanted people to pray for the spiritual and physical welfare of their siblings and relatives, and for the strength, courage, and wisdom to be humble. When they lack the desire to pray, they should seek Mary's intercession so that she may offer the needed help.⁹⁰

On August 4, 1982, and again two nights later, Agnes reported experiencing visions of Mary. After six weeks, she reported that Jesus appeared to her charging her with a mission to bring the youth of the world back from the sin of the flesh.⁹¹ She said Jesus was calling the youth to conversion and prayer, asking them to keep their bodies holy. The essence of Jesus' message to Agnes concerned his imminent return and that humanity should prepare for this.⁹²

⁸⁶ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibehe*, 19

⁸⁷ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibehe*, 107.

⁸⁸ Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibehe*, 19.

⁸⁹ Some sources cite the date as May 15, 1982.

⁹⁰ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibehe*, 120-22.

⁹¹ Ilibagiza and Erwin, *Our Lady of Kibehe*, 115-117.

⁹² Maindron, *Apparitions of Our Lady at Kibehe*, 63. See pp. 63-66 for details of some Jesus' messages on this occasion.

Based on these reports, it appears the ecclesiastical judgment on the apparitions failed to clarify the “disquieting personal situations” these visionaries developed. Accounts of their testimonies do not appear to controvert Christian revelation or Church teaching. Their messages are doctrinally and thematically consistent with those given to the first three. Furthermore, among the mix were Emmanuel, an adherent of African traditional religion, who along with his family converted to the Catholic faith, and Vestine, a Muslim. Jesus or Mary reportedly also entrusted them with evangelizing missions to shepherd souls, reaffirming the Kibeho message.

Another inconsistency is the Church’s position on Medjugorje. The Medjugorje and Kibeho visions unfolded in parallel, with claims of the former still ongoing. Since the apparitions began in 1981, more than 40 million people have visited Medjugorje.⁹³ The themes of Mary’s messages have to do with faith, prayer, fasting, penance, conversion, and peace that have their foundation in the Gospels and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.⁹⁴ The content of these messages point to Christ as the One Redeemer and Mediator, renewal in the Holy Spirit, and Mary’s universal motherhood and intercession. They emphasize the Mass and Eucharistic Adoration, sacramental Confession, and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. They explicate the concepts of heaven, purgatory, hell, and Satan. They foster ecumenism, family and community prayer, offering suffering and sacrifice, abandonment to God and eschatological urgency.⁹⁵ More pilgrims are visiting Medjugorje than Kibeho and yet the Church has ruled these visions *non constat de supernaturalitate*.

The next section analyzes the root causes of 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the reported claims of its connection with the apparitions.

⁹³ Medjugorje official website, <https://www.medjugorje.org/> (accessed May 1, 2019).

⁹⁴ Mark I. Miravalle, *The Message of Medjugorje: The Marian Message to the Modern World* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 63-76.

⁹⁵ Miravalle, *Message of Medjugorje*, 49-59.

5.2 Historical-Critical Analysis of the Kibeho Apparitions and the Genocide in Rwanda

This section is a historical-critical study of what led to the genocide and an examination of the validity of the claims linking the Rwandan holocaust to the Kibeho apparitions.

5.2.1 The Underlying Causes of the Genocide in Rwanda

A number of literary sources summarize the cause of the Rwandan genocide as the systematic extermination of one ethnic group by another. However, Rwandan-born Josias Semujanga argues that it would be a mistake to explain the 1994 genocide as the mere result of an ethnic conflict. It is not enough, he claims, to focus on the external dimension of the transformation of the indigenous Rwandan view of themselves, but to understand the shift from a tripolar structure of pre-Christian Rwanda to the present bipolar structure.⁹⁶ An examination of Church-State relations during Belgian colonial rule in Rwanda offers a perspective that unmasks the role of the colonizers in pitting one group against the other in the pre-independence period according to ethicist Judith Kay.⁹⁷ While Kay claims that the colonizers framed the Tutsi as “middle agents,” James Carney argues that there were also “local agents” that played a perverse role in facilitating or perpetrating one of the worst crimes against humanity. Like Semujanga, Carney cautions that attributing hostile Hutu-Tutsi relations solely to European colonial masters neglects the importance of local agency and local lore. Carney focuses on Church-State relations in the post-independence period, the complexity of Rwandan history and late colonial views of ethnicity.⁹⁸ Semujanga focuses on the ideology of Hutu power to develop and execute a well-planned conspiracy to exterminate the Tutsi, and to justify the

⁹⁶ Tom Rockmore, *Origins of Rwandan Genocide*, Josias Semujanga (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 12-13.

⁹⁷ Judith W. Kay, “Middle Agents as Marginalized: How the Rwandan Genocide Challenges Ethics from the Margins,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 33, no. 2 (2013): 23-30.

⁹⁸ James J. Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide: Catholic Politics and Ethnic Discourse in the Late Colonial Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 208, 324 n.41.

genocide as lineage conflict. Before presenting these three perspectives, it is important to understand the Hutu-Tutsi social question. It clarifies that the political transformation of the indigenous Rwandan view of themselves preexisted the advent of European missionaries and colonizers at the end of the nineteenth century.

5.2.1.1 *The Hutu-Tutsi Question*

The question of assigning an identity to “the Hutu” and “the Tutsi” remains unresolved despite much scholarship over the past century. For this reason, Carney advises the exercise of prudence when using these labels. Even the term “ethnic” to describe each group is ambiguous because it does not suggest that the “Hutu” and “Tutsi” are timeless, unchanging, genetically distinct categories or that they form a cultural group sharing a common language and religion.⁹⁹ Instead, he follows David Newbury’s understanding of ethnicity as “a largely political identity that shifted through time.”¹⁰⁰ Who then are the “Hutu” and the “Tutsi” and how did they transform into a political identity?

In “*Leave None to Tell the Story*” *Genocide in Rwanda*, Alison Des Forges writes that who are known today as the Hutu and Tutsi are descendants of people who settled in the region around Rwanda over a period of two thousand years. They organized themselves into small groups based on lineage or loyalty to a leader. They developed a sophisticated language Kinyarwanda, common religious and philosophical beliefs, and a culture that values song, dance, poetry, and rhetoric. Agricultural cultivation and livestock led to fertile soil, and regular rainfall made the region so productive that by 1994 Rwanda was one of the most densely populated countries in Africa.¹⁰¹ These cultivators and pastoralists shaped Rwandan institutions. For instance,

⁹⁹ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ David Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists: Essays on Identity and Authority in Precolonial Congo and Rwanda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 298, 300, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Alison Des Forges, “*Leave None to Tell the Story*” *Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 31.

cultivators who showed leadership in attracting and mobilizing a large following rose within the ranks of the military especially during the reign of Mwami Rwabugiri in the 19th century. As its military strength grew, Rwanda sought to consolidate its power in the region further by attacking neighboring people regardless of lineage or occupational status.¹⁰²

With the growth and sophistication of the state, the ruling elite tried to distinguish themselves from the ordinary people. Des Forges asserts that the word “Tutsi” which initially meant a person rich in cattle and therefore defining the person’s status, soon became the term that referred to the elite ruling class as a whole. “Hutu,” a term that initially meant someone subordinate to a powerful person later referred to the ordinary masses. Therefore, by the time the Germans and Belgians arrived in Rwanda at the end of the 19th century, Tutsi had already identified themselves as pastoralists (the powerful elite) and the Hutu (the land cultivators) as subjects. The Hutu and Tutsi married within their occupational group. Intermarriage was not unusual but the practice declined at the start of the 20th century and revived after the Tutsi lost power in the 1959 Hutu revolution. With the rise in intermarriage in the recent past, it has become difficult to distinguish Hutu from Tutsi.¹⁰³

A third group, the Twa, constituting a mere one percent of the population before the genocide, lives in forests and survives by hunting and gathering. They speak a dialect of Kinyarwanda, and are immediately distinguishable from Hutu and Tutsi by their smaller stature. In recent decades, Des Forges writes, the Twa became potters, laborers, or servants for Hutu and Tutsi, who shunned intermarriage and even sharing of food or drink with them. Though this

¹⁰² Alison Des Forges, “When a Foreign Country Rebels: The Ideology and Practice of War in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Rwanda,” Symposium on Warfare and Society in Africa, Yale University, 1990, in Des Forges, *“Leave None to Tell the Story,”* 32.

¹⁰³ Des Forges, *“Leave None to Tell the Story,”* 32-33.

study focuses on the Hutu and Tutsi, there is no denying the killing of many of the Twa during the genocide while some also became killers.¹⁰⁴

Known for their “grand narratives” (collections of oral stories), Rwandans may have created a situation for conflict through storytelling. Controversial narratives overshadow the Twa, describe the migration and origin of the Tutsi in Rwanda, and lay emphasis on the Hutu as indigenous Rwandans. These narratives together with the external influence of the colonizers as well as local agents like the state and church have played their role in the genocide that unfolded. In light of Hutu-Tutsi sociopolitical relations, different theories emerged from an exploration of what led to the 1994 genocide. Three theories included here are the “lineage conflict” perspective of Semujanga, the perspective of “middle agency” or scapegoating proposed by Kay, and Carney’s view of “local agency” and their accountability.

5.2.1.2 *Genocide as Lineage Conflict According to Gihangan Myth*

Semujanga argues that the genocide is not the outgrowth of a mere ethnic conflict. There are studies that focus on the external (colonial) dimension as being responsible for the political transformation of the indigenous Rwandan view of themselves. He, however, focuses on the racial ideology of hatred for the “enemy within” in the present bipolar structure of Rwandan society as the underlying cause of the genocide.¹⁰⁵ The ineradicable memory of this racial ideology of hatred of the Tutsi carried forward into the post-independence era. The genocide was not a case of blind extremism, but inspired by the sociopolitical situation of the pre-Christian period

¹⁰⁴ Des Forges, “*Leave None to Tell the Story*,” 33-34.

¹⁰⁵ Semujanga, *Origins of Rwandan Genocide*, 15-16. According to tradition, the early inhabitants of Rwanda known as Banyarwanda believed that a common ancestor, Gihanga, founded the Rwandan kingdom. He had three sons—Gahutu, Gatutsi, and Gatwa who gave the ancestors of the Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa their names. The shared power of this triple chieftaincy made the political system flexible, but tensions between Hutu and Tutsi arose when the chieftaincies and subchieftaincies of the Twa and Hutu were eliminated (1926) after the arrival of the Belgians. In a tripolar structure of the administration under European rule, the Tutsi elite enjoyed many privileges over the rest of the Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa. In the post-independence period, with colonizers gone, the tripolar structure became bipolar.

(see “The Hutu-Tutsi Question”). The repeated massacres of the Tutsi in 1959-1961, 1963-1964, and 1973 followed a systematic protocol that was culturally determined long before the arrival of the colonizers. In their marginalization, the Hutu militiamen executed well-organized killings while emotional fever led Hutu peasants to kill randomly. The elite rarely participated in the killings, but gave orders when the time was appropriate.¹⁰⁶

The party for Hutu emancipation known as PARMEHUTU espoused an anti-Tutsi ideology for decades. The preparation for the execution of these crimes and the manipulation of the population and the media by Hutu leaders explains the lack of remorse by the perpetrators. They denied the genocide based on the principle that killing the enemy reinforced the kinship line established by the Gihangan myth.¹⁰⁷ With no *rubanda* (third party) in post-independence Rwanda, the Hutu justified the killings of the Tutsi as one of preservation of lineage. Killing Tutsi meant eliminating the enemy, a rewriting of the Gihangan myth.¹⁰⁸

5.2.1.3 Middle Agency and Scapegoating the Exploited Ally

In three discourses, Kay emphasizes that European missionaries contributed negatively to the genocide leading to the scapegoating of the Tutsi elite in the perpetration of crimes against the rest.¹⁰⁹ In the first discourse, following Longman, Kay characterizes the relationship between the colonizers and the Tutsi elite as collaborative in a perverse sense. The Belgians coerced Tutsi rulers into exploiting Hutu laborers to comply with colonial tactics of exploitation (forced labor, forced crops, and forced sales). Failure to comply meant punishment or deposition of the ruler. These oppressive policies masked the visible privileges granted to

¹⁰⁶ Semujanga, *Origins of Rwandan Genocide*, 202.

¹⁰⁷ Semujanga, *Origins of Rwandan Genocide*, 203. The Gihangan myth asserts that *Sebazungu* (third party) resolved the conflict between *Sebahinzi* (Bahutu) and *Sebatinzi* (Batutsi). In this context, *Sebazungu* refers to the colonizers.

¹⁰⁸ Semujanga, *Origins of Rwandan Genocide*, 203-204.

¹⁰⁹ Kay, “Middle Agents as Marginalized,” 23-30.

Tutsi elite for carrying out brutal exploitation of Hutu laborers. Kay writes, “Belgian policy made it appear as if the exploitation of the poor was the work of the Tutsi alone rather than a result of Belgian domination. Tutsi middle agency came with a steep price of separation from their fellow Rwandans. Although privileged, these middle agents became vulnerable to abandonment from above and attack from below.”¹¹⁰

According to Kay’s second discourse, the Belgians assigned ethnic attributes to the Hutu and the Tutsi by identifying them as Hamite and non-Hamite respectively. Drawing from an ideology that Caucasians were the sole civilized race, the colonizers regarded the Tutsi as non-native Hamites. They characterized the Hutu as black and native African, meaning deserving of exploitation.¹¹¹ In other African nations, the Hutu were ethnically subdivided based on different customs and laws, but not in Rwanda. Kay argues that the colonizers created a monolithic racial identity for the Hutu pitting them against the Tutsi. Again, the Tutsi elite became middle agents of the colonizer rather than linked with the Hutu with whom they shared much in common. As a monolithic group in Rwanda, the Hutu found it difficult to secure Hutu allies from outside and this isolation came to full expression during the genocide.¹¹²

The *Bahutu Manifesto* of March 1957¹¹³ released by Hutu elite suggested that the Tutsi as foreigners did not belong in Rwanda, the third discourse. Instead of emphasizing dissimilarities,

¹¹⁰ Kay, “Middle Agents as Marginalized,” 24. Also see *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (African Studies), Timothy Longman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Des Forges, “*Leave None to Tell the Story*,” 34-35.

¹¹¹ Kay, “Middle Agents as Marginalized,” 26-27.

¹¹² Kay, “Middle Agents as Marginalized,” 27-28. The colonizers watered the already-planted seeds of racial segregation. Prior colonization, the Hutu and the Tutsi intermarried, shared the same religion, language, and history. A Hutu could become a Tutsi through marriage or the acquisition of wealth, while a Tutsi who lost power could become a Hutu.

¹¹³ Peter C. Safari, “Church, State, and the Rwandan Genocide,” *Political Theology* 11, no. 6 (2010): 877. Safari notes that in the 1940s, a younger generation of missionaries from Belgium and France arrived in Rwanda to address urgent social issues of justice and liberation. They identified with the grievances of the Hutu who studied in their missionary schools. The Hutu desire for emancipation led them to sponsor the formation of a Hutu political party with Hutu elites who had studied in missionary seminaries and schools, exacerbating tensions with the Tutsi.

the manifesto created binaries—Hamitic versus non-Hamitic, nonindigenous versus indigenous—thereby “obscuring the hand of the colonizer and setting up middle agents to be isolated from their fellow oppressed group, the Hutu.”¹¹⁴ By characterizing the Tutsi as a foreign race, the manifesto reaffirmed the Hutu view that they were the rightful rulers of Rwanda.¹¹⁵

Later in Kay’s account, she observes that Church leaders had developed a pattern of aligning themselves with the political elite rather than with the impoverished Hutu masses. Masking Tutsi privilege obscured the coercion and oppression of the Tutsi elite as a colonized puppet, blinding all to their middle agency and subsequent vulnerability.¹¹⁶

5.2.1.4 *Local Agency and Postcolonial Views on Ethnicity*

As Rwanda gradually established herself as a republic beginning in July 1962, colonial influence continued to predominate. Carney argues that the role of local agents like the state and church in the post-independence period leading up to and during the genocide must account for postcolonial views on ethnicity. Hostilities between Hutu and Tutsi peaked in 1959-61, 1963-64, 1973, and 1990-93 leading to significant loss of life, mostly Tutsi, and finally the genocide of 1994.

Accountability of the State

When Habyarimana, a Hutu came to power in the July 1973 coup d’état, he took over from Grégoire Kayibanda¹¹⁷ and promised to put an end to Hutu-Tutsi violence by initiating a moral revolution.¹¹⁸ He sought to portray the Tutsi as an indigenous ethnic group with a legitimate home in Rwanda rather than as a foreign race, but the Tutsi, fearing another massacre like that in 1959-61, 1963-64, and early 1973, fled to Uganda where they were ethnic aliens. This

¹¹⁴ Kay, “Middle Agents as Marginalized,” 28.

¹¹⁵ Kay, “Middle Agents as Marginalized,” 28-30.

¹¹⁶ Kay, “Middle Agents as Marginalized,” 25.

¹¹⁷ Grégoire Kayibanda was the first elected President of Rwanda who fought for independence from Belgium, toppled the Tutsi monarchy, and established a Hutu-majority government.

¹¹⁸ Safari, “Church, State, and the Rwandan Genocide,” 880.

made them yearn a return home. The Hutu in Rwanda, fearing a fallback to subservient status under the Tutsi, violently attacked those Tutsi crossing blocked borders between Uganda and Rwanda.¹¹⁹ In 1991, Habyarimana's reforms introduced multiparty rule, but according to Carney, the hardline stance and political manipulation of emerging parties impeded progress. The youth militia of these parties, later known as the *interhamwe* ("those who work together") during the genocide, exacerbated Hutu-Tutsi tensions carrying out six massacres of Tutsi between October 1990 and January 1993.

In August 1993, the UN brokered the Arusha Accords calling for the reintegration of Tutsi exiles, the incorporation of the RPF into the Rwandan military, and for national unity.¹²⁰ The violence that spread peaked in October 1993 with the assassination of Burundi's first democratically elected president, Melchior Ndadaye along with other members of his government by a Tutsi-led army.¹²¹

Amidst the violence, Rwanda and Burundi observed the silence of the local Church and the muted reaction of the international community. Reflecting in 2015, Carney writes that a minority of Catholic priests, religious, and lay catechists, rather than speak out against these atrocities, actively facilitated or participated in the killings. The Rwandan Catholic Church hierarchy remained silent during the initial weeks of the genocide. Though political and ethnic identities rather than the religious appear to have motivated the genocide, what is deplorable is the failure of the Catholic social identity to denounce violence.¹²² How and why did the Catholic

¹¹⁹ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 160, in Kay, "Middle Agents as Marginalized," 29.

¹²⁰ David Newbury and Catherine Newbury, "A Catholic Mass in Kigali: Contested Views of the Genocide and Ethnicity in Rwanda," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 33, no. 2/3 (1999): 308, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 194, 315 n. 98.

¹²¹ Gatwa, "Resisting Democracy in Rwanda," 196. Gatwa suggests Ndadaye's assassination likely led to the collapse of the Arusha Accords in Rwanda.

¹²² James J. Carney, "A Generation after Genocide: Catholic Reconciliation in Rwanda," *Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2015): 786.

Church play a complicit role in the genocide when it should been an outspoken moral voice? This question involves a multifaceted response.

Complicity of the Catholic Church in the Genocide

Carney cautions against exonerating the Church from all corporate responsibility, or directing all blame against her for the genocide.¹²³ He points out certain disturbing patterns that emerged from the late colonial period. First, going back to the late 1950s, some Rwandan bishops aligned themselves with the state while others maintained prophetic distance. For instance, André Perraudin's successor, Thadée Nsengiyumva, issued a pastoral letter in 1991 in which he rebuked the Catholic Church for its failure to speak out against ethnic segregation, to examine the social causes of corruption, injustice, war, AIDS, and the Catholic bishops' silence in the face of the Tutsi massacres in Kibilira, Bigogwe, Murambi, and Bugesera.¹²⁴ Second, Carney claims the Catholic bishops offered little support to *Kinyamateka*, the Catholic press journal that was critical of the government. After the suspicious accidental death of its editor, Sylvio Sindambiwe, his successor, André Sibomana, a Hutu priest and human rights advocate, used *Kinyamateka* and the White Father journal, *Dialogue*, as avenues for the free exchange of ideas even those critical of the government. Third, Rwandan bishops emphasized love of country and national security as a duty incumbent on all Catholics, prioritizing this over love of neighbor. In the early 1990s, the bishops and church-affiliated human rights groups actively appealed for national unity against Tutsi collaborators, including the RPF. However, episcopal statements that preached love of enemies and deplored political intolerance fell short of condemning the Tutsi massacres. Rather than blame the RPF and the government, Tutsi and

¹²³ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 195.

¹²⁴ Cf. "Lettre Pastorale du presbyterium de Kabgayi, 'Convertissons-nous pour vivre ensemble dans la paix,' 1 December 1991," in *Les crises politiques au Burundi et au Rwanda (1993-1994): Analyses faits et documents*, ed. André Guichaous (Paris: Université de Lille, 1995), 647-648, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 195-196.

Hutu were held accountable.¹²⁵ Carney follows Longman's argument that though the bishops did not exhort the killings, they created "a 'moral climate' of silence and pro-government complicity where the genocide could become ethically permissible."¹²⁶

During the genocide, church parishes that once served as asylums during the anti-Tutsi violence of 1959 to 1964 became scenes of unprecedented death and horror in 1994. In Carney's account, more Tutsi died in churches than in any other place with Kabgayi parish as high as 65,000 to 75,000. Across Rwanda, hundreds of thousands of mostly Tutsi priests, religious, and lay Catholics perished. Even while the Vatican spoke out against the gruesome horror, the Rwandan Catholic bishops remained silent. When they first broke silence more than a month after the killings started, they referred to the massacres as "tragic events" rather than "genocide."¹²⁷ The alignment of the Rwandan Catholic Church with the ruling political powers in the postcolonial period left the people without the one moral voice they could count on. The problem, according to Saska Hoyweghen, stemmed from the church's view that violence and corruption were not structural problems but an aberration. The Church saw no need to question political structures where her operations were thriving.¹²⁸

Not all bishops were culpable in the genocide. Carney acknowledges that when government leaders fled Gitarama and Gisenyi on June 2, three bishops—Vincent Nsengiyumva (Kigali), Thadée Nsengiyumva (Kabgayi), and Joseph Ruzindana (Byumba) stayed behind, paving the way for their sacrificial death by assassination on June 3 along with nine other

¹²⁵ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 197.

¹²⁶ Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, 163, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 197.

¹²⁷ "Déclaration des responsables des Églises catholique et protestante, Kabgayi, 13 May 1994," in Guichaous, *Les crises politiques*, 650, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 198.

¹²⁸ Saskia Hoyweghen, "The Disintegration of the Catholic Church of Rwanda: A Study of the Fragmentation of Political and Religious Authority," *African Affairs* 95 (1996): 385.

clergymen.¹²⁹ Any condemnation by Catholic bishops and Protestant leaders once again ignored the role of the RPF and interim government, preferring instead to identify Habyarimana's assassination as the catalyst for what transpired.¹³⁰ Carney affirms that the post-genocide Arusha trials implicated 34 Catholic clergy and religious in facilitating or perpetrating the killings. Gikongoro Bishop Misago was implicated in Rwanda, but was later exonerated. While a minority of clergy, religious, and lay leaders actively participated in the killings, one must not lose sight of the many who lost their lives protecting the Tutsi from the *interhamwe*.¹³¹

Twelve years before the genocide, during the August 19, 1982 apparition, Alphonsine, Anathalie and Marie-Claire claimed they saw scenes of indescribable horror, death and carnage. On June 25 the following year, Ivanka Ivanovic, a Medjugorje visionary, claimed she saw a parallel scene of death and destruction, and the massacre of Rwandans in a vision.

5.2.2 Assessment of the Prophetic Link between the Genocide and the Apparitions

After the genocide, Rwandans retrospectively reflected on the August 19, 1982 vision to Alphonsine, Anathalie, and Marie-Claire as a prophecy of the 1994 genocide. There is no denying the apocalyptic magnitude of the genocide, or that the alleged vision closely resembles the carnage of 1994. However, to attribute the genocide to human failure to heed Mary's warnings or to the prophetic vision fails to take into consideration Rwandan history, past apparitional patterns, the possibility of error in human interpretation, or the chronology of events.

¹²⁹ Bernard Lugan, *Rwanda: Le génocide, l'Église et la démocratie* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2004), 178, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 198.

¹³⁰ Cf. Joseph Ngomanzungu, *Efforts de Médiation oecuménique des églises dans la crise rwandaise: Le comité de contacts (1991-1994)* (Kigali, 2003), 90-95, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 198.

¹³¹ See, for example, André Sibomana, *Hope for Rwanda: Conversations with Laure Guilbert and Herve Deguine* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 54-76, 123-126; Hugh McCullum, *The Angels Have Left Us: The Rwanda Tragedy and the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), 78, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 199.

First, linking the genocide to Mary's warnings raises the counter-question whether the genocide would not have taken place had Rwandans abided by her message. Prior to 1994, Rwandan history was witness to bloody massacres and pogroms (1959-61, 1963-64, 1973, and 1990-93) resulting in a significant loss of life.¹³² The magnitude of the human toll suggests that 1994 genocide was a carefully orchestrated "final solution" to exterminate the Tutsi. As Semujanga, Kay, and Carney point out, many actors played a part in one of the worst crimes in history. These include the Hutu, the Tutsi elite, the colonizers, the church and the state. Though Kay's discourses make it appear that the Belgians scapegoated their allies, the Tutsi elite as responsible for the crimes against the Hutu, Semujanga clarifies that Rwandan history shows that the seeds of segregation were sown before the arrival of the colonial masters. He explains that Rwandan grand narratives (including myth and folklore) played a role in the evolution of an ideology of hatred that predates Rwandan colonization. This, however, does not absolve the colonizers because they watered these seeds further exacerbating an already hostile situation. They created binaries that delineated the boundaries between the indigenous and non-indigenous, those considered Hamite versus non-Hamite. What is inconceivable is that among the colonizers were Christian missionaries whose goal was to evangelize the people. Rather than bring about reconciliation, they allowed the existing situation to fester into an ideology where violence, killings, and massacres became ethically justified, so contrary to their missionary objective and the values of the gospel. As a result, a Hutu ideology of hatred toward the Tutsi elite over the course of decades became so ingrained that it carried over into the post-independence era.

¹³² Massacres were not limited to Tutsi or to Rwanda. In 1972, a failed coup d'état by Hutu military officers in neighboring Burundi led to the death of 200,000 Hutu by Tutsi military dictatorship.

Second, there is a tendency to model one apparition after past apparitional patterns. For instance, at La Salette the Virgin reportedly warned the children of an impending famine if people did not change their lives, and the potato famine ensued. The Virgin of Fátima promised an end to one war, but prophesied an even bigger one if people did not repent and take care of each other. World War I ended, but World War II that encased the Jewish Holocaust followed 21 years later. The realization of Mary's prophetic warnings at La Salette and Fátima may have led to the deduction that the range of her prophetic authority extended to Kibeho as well.

Third, though no one can affirm with certainty, it is possible that the scenes in the alleged August 19 vision were an anticipation of the 1994 genocide or the 1995 Kibeho massacre. Even if this were true and despite the fact that the Church has approved these three seers, one cannot rule out error in human interpretation. Human error is the reason the Church holds that visions and private revelations do not belong to the category of graces that make people holy by their reception, and even genuine visions and revelations may become occasions of diminishing the vigor of faith,¹³³ especially when the emphasis is on the apocalyptic.

Lastly, with respect to the vision received by Ivanka Ivanovic of Medjugorje, the question linking her vision to the 1994 genocide was posed in 1995 by which time news of the genocide had disseminated to the world. It was not until after the end of the genocide that a prophetic connection between the Kibeho and Medjugorje apparitions and the genocide was made. Ivanovic claimed she saw Rwandans being massacred in her vision. How did she know they were Rwandans? There is no known report where the three Kibeho visionaries were asked about their interpretation of the August 19 vision before or after the genocide.

¹³³ William G. Most, *Vatican II Marian Council* (Athione: St. Paul Publications, 1972), 155-157.

Like Fátima, Kibeho proves that emphasis on the apocalyptic can turn an apparition into a political tool to justify human aggression and acts of violence, or even to a transactional understanding of faith. The judgment on the apparitions makes no mention of the apocalyptic vision or the genocide, but instead focuses on the banal aspects of the overall message and the fruits they have borne for the Diocese of Gikongoro and the Church in Rwanda. Mary's pleas for repentance and reconciliation, conversion, and a restored relationship with God through traditional Christian practices of Adoration, Eucharist, and Rosary are the essence of the message of Kibeho, much needed in the 1980s, even more now. The diversity of visionaries also gives the Church reason to reflect on hidden messages behind Kibeho such as the inducement to interreligious unity, and Jesus' preferential option for the poor, and aspects of Christian anthropology that uphold human personhood.

With this historical and sociopolitical perspective of the some of the underlying causes of the genocide, the next section draws attention to some of the implications of the Kibeho apparitions for the church in Rwanda.

5.3 Assessment: Implications of Kibeho for Ecclesial Life

Kibeho became a worthy case for approval by The Holy See because it strengthened the prayer and faith life of the Diocese of Gikongoro and the Church in Rwanda. As Misago's declaration noted, it became a powerful help for pastors who shepherd souls. Its message is not new revelation, but rather reinforces the ordinary teaching of the Church.¹³⁴ The spiritual and devotional nature of the messages of the Mother of the Word with their evangelical and apocalyptic tone echo the Spirit's message to the seven churches of Asia Minor, an ahistorical biblical referent for this study. At Kibeho, Mary's evangelical role in leading souls to her Son, her preparing them for his return, her desire to accompany them in their journey of theodicy, and her pleas to all believers to seek her intercession, are manifestations of the Spirit's action in her. The extraordinariness of the Kibeho message is its mundanity that surpasses its apocalyptic value.

This final section stresses that the apparitions at Kibeho are the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, and how the Mother of the Word is a symbol of liberating spirituality for the bereaved. It addresses some of the lessons of the 1994 genocide and how Mary's prophetic message put Rwandans on the path of reconciliation and healing.

5.3.1 The Presence and Action of the Holy Spirit in the Mother of the Word

Whether it is Mary in her maternal role as Mother of the Church, or in her prophetic role as *Nyina wa Jambo*, Ruzindaza writes that "it is hard to imagine the intervention of the Virgin Mary on earth in our time without seeing in [her] the action and presence of the Holy Spirit."¹³⁵ Nyina wa Jambo who appeared at Kibeho is the Virgin who was told by the angel: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). Ruzindaza draws a parallel between Mary's intervention at Kibeho and what St. Paul calls

¹³⁴ Mboneyabo, "Judgment on the apparitions," 8.

¹³⁵ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 190.

“spiritual worship.” In fact, in her messages Mary appears to be reiterating the words of Paul to the Romans: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2). This reawakening by the Spirit that Paul extends to the faithful in hope that they begin to think of God’s mercy is implicit in Mary’s prophetic message. It reminds people to worship God alone, to offer God a holy sacrifice, and urges them to desire and do what is pleasing to God. For this, the faithful need to “reevaluate their behavior in order to change and acquire a new mind which yearns for God and to do his will.” Ruzindaza writes that the pilgrims descending upon Kibeho to listen (via the visionaries) to what the Mother of the Word had to tell them is a sign of the *sensus fidelium*.¹³⁶

5.3.2 *Nyina wa Jambo*, A Symbol of Liberating Spirituality

Though feminists find that Marian devotion has emphasized and essentialized motherhood as the path to holiness for women, Mary Grey writes that Mary’s motherhood understood in an ecclesial symbolic sense provides a more accurate understanding for the practice of spirituality. It does not romanticize motherhood nor describes women’s identity as only motherhood, but interprets it more holistically. Maria Clara Bingemer and Yvone Gebara see Mary as the Mother of the Poor who speaks on their behalf as she did in her Magnificat, especially women who become vulnerable in contexts of injustice and oppression.¹³⁷ Her tears and sorrow not only represent her personal grief but that for a suffering humanity.

¹³⁶ Ruzindaza, *Fascinating Story of Kibeho*, 190-91.

¹³⁷ Mary C. Grey, *To Rwanda and Back: Liberation Spirituality and Reconciliation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2007), 64-65.

A recurring theme of Mary's apparitions at Kibeho was suffering for the expiation of sin. In her anguish during her Son's Passion and Death, Mary assumed two postures, one biblical, the other aesthetic. Peter Daino writes that as *Stabat Mater* (Standing Mother), Mary stood near the foot of the cross not only accompanying her Son in his suffering to the end of his earthly life, but also as Mother of the Church, standing beside those who suffer and are tempted to despair.¹³⁸ Those unjustly persecuted identify with this image of *Stabat Mater* who witnessed the daily crucifixion of her Son. The Mother of the Word cries during her apparitions to the three primary visionaries on August 19, 1982 as she anticipates cradling the innocent dead of Rwanda and those who have stood helpless against the principalities, systems, and powers of injustice. Daino writes that her fortitude is humble courage that risks everything for love. By standing, she does not cower, but points to injustice showing humanity the way to stand alongside the oppressed in their suffering.¹³⁹ By emphasizing repentance, reconciliation, and a return to God, the Mother of the Word at Kibeho is preparing her children (including oppressors) for her Son's return. Daino writes that to his mother, Jesus bequeath the millions of dispossessed (*Stabat Pauper*) for their possession, millions of refugees (*Stabat Exsul*) for their refuge, and millions of oppressed (*Stabat Libertus*) for their liberation, reflecting that in his mother Jesus saw a redeemed humanity for whom he was dying and who would someday stand before him in their glorified bodies.¹⁴⁰

The *Pietà*, Daino writes, is not a biblical image, but the work of Christian artists, more famously Michelangelo, whose imagination tried to capture Mary's understanding of Jesus' death. As *Pietà*, the Blessed Mother cradles her dead Son. For human beings, death conjures up negative images, but the *Pietà* projects death as having maternal arms. It reminds the beholder of

¹³⁸ Peter Daino, *Stabat Mater: Noble Icon of the Outcast and the Poor* (New York, Alba House, 1988), 75.

¹³⁹ Daino, *Stabat Mater*, 70.

¹⁴⁰ Daino, *Stabat Mater*, 74.

Jesus' last seven words to his heavenly Father: "Into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46) that even in death, Jesus entrusts his *pneuma* to the maternal hands of God. The Pietà presents death as mother, one who is tender and at peace with eyes closed, and yet her whole body is attentive to the one who lies in her arms. In Rwanda, in Africa, and in many third world contexts, children, women, and men die on a daily basis owing to their helplessness against forces of oppression and persecution. Like the Stabat Mater, the Pietà becomes an icon for a spirituality of resistance that is broader than motherhood.¹⁴¹ The Pietà is a very Christian image that induces the faithful to keep asking questions such as why Rwandans had to suffer the genocide. At the same time, the Pietà symbolizes a faith that death is a tender mother receiving and carrying a redeemed humanity into the Parousia.¹⁴²

The genocide teaches the Catholic Church important lessons about truth and her role in bringing about healing in post-genocidal Rwanda. But how can a Church found culpable for complicity in the genocide be an agent of reconciliation in its aftermath? Before reflecting on this question, a review of some of these lessons follows.

5.3.3 Lessons from the Genocide for the Local and World Church

The 1994 genocide teaches the local and global church important lessons of ecclesial significance. Carney identifies three lessons for the church and church leaders—the necessity of ecclesial repentance, the need for the church to maintain prophetic distance from the state, and the centrality of nonviolence in Christian politics.¹⁴³ Any step toward reconciliation must begin with the acknowledgment of guilt. *Lumen gentium* reminds church leaders of the need to be self-

¹⁴¹ Grey, *To Rwanda and Back*, 71.

¹⁴² Daino, *Stabat Mater*, 75-76.

¹⁴³ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, "Epilogue," 201.

critical and of constant purification by following the path of repentance and renewal.¹⁴⁴ In Rwanda, that need was never more urgent than in the aftermath of the genocide. Carney recalls that John Paul II called for an “ecclesial examination of conscience” before the turn of the twentieth century. Benedict XVI, acknowledging the clerical sex abuse scandal of recent decades said, “We see in a truly terrifying way that the greatest persecution of the Church does not come from outside enemies but is born of sin within the Church.”¹⁴⁵ The Catholic Church’s complicity in the genocide is another example of grave sin rooted institutionally within.

The promise of redemption that the Christian gospel guarantees necessitates the confession of sin and repentance at both individual and institutional levels.¹⁴⁶ Drawing on the work of Longman and Don Webster, Carney writes that during and after the genocide, church leaders encouraged Christians to repent for their sins. As a result, Catholics became involved in parish reconciliation initiatives, prison ministries, and the state-led *gacaca* process.¹⁴⁷ However, to limit repentance to individuals (the laity) is “to lose sight of the communal, social, and institutional nature of the Catholic Church ... and to ignore the structural nature of sin.”¹⁴⁸ Carney further points out that some members of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church resisted admission of institutional complicity for fear of political manipulation. Following Longman, he states that in the years leading to the genocide, the Church embodied the worst tendencies in

¹⁴⁴ Vatican II, *LG* §8, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 202. Carney’s quote, however, matches CCC 1428 rather than *Lumen gentium*.

¹⁴⁵ Philip Pullella, “‘Sin within the Church’ threat to Catholicism: Pope Benedict,” *Reuters*, 11 May 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-abuse-portugal/sin-within-the-church-threat-to-catholicism-pope-benedict-idUSTRE64A1W220100511>, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 202.

¹⁴⁶ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 202.

¹⁴⁷ Timothy Longman, “Justice at the grassroots? *Gacaca* trials in Rwanda,” in *Transitional Justice in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Truths versus Justice*, eds. Naomi Roht-Arriaza and Javier Mariezcurrena (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 206-28. Also, Don Webster, “The Uneasy Relationship between the ICTR and *Gacaca*,” in *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence*, eds. Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 184-93. Cited in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 202.

¹⁴⁸ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 202.

ethnic chauvinism, power politics, and silent complicity.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, the church's sacramental practice of reconciliation is essential to local and national processes of repentance and healing.¹⁵⁰

While it would be impossible for the church to isolate herself completely from state politics, one of the sins of the church in Rwanda was her failure to maintain prophetic distance from state leaders. Carney writes that for decades between 1930 and 1994, every major Rwandan political leader had his perceived ecclesial champion.¹⁵¹ The church's political task is not to run or partner with the state to achieve her institutional interests, but to be "a prophetic herald of the common good, calling the state away from its tendencies toward self-love and national pride and toward a politics of self-sacrificing service on behalf of the marginalized." The Catholic Church encourages a "politics of neutrality," urging her leaders to a mediating role, but playing a passive role can also lead to the charge of the church's complicity in evil.¹⁵² During the violence in the years before the genocide, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Rwanda released a pastoral letter stating: "If we do not clearly denounce lies, corruption, theft, oppression, arbitrary imprisonment, and assassinations with their authors, whether this be an individual, a group, or the powerful, we cannot avoid a sense of culpability, which may appear to be complicity."¹⁵³

Carney emphasizes that it is not whether the church separates herself from politics or whether she has a politics of her own, but rather what type of politics is faithful to the gospel of Christ. "The church must embrace the self-sacrificing politics of the cross, forming beatitudinal communities of mercy, justice, righteousness, and peace who may be 'persecuted for the sake of

¹⁴⁹ Longman, *Christianity and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 304-323, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 202.

¹⁵⁰ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 203, 205.

¹⁵¹ Gérard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 356. Mutara Rudahigwa had Léon Classe; Grégoire Kayibanda had André Perraudin; and Juvénal Habyarimana had Vincent Nsengiyumva.

¹⁵² Prunier, *Africa's World War*, 356, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 203.

¹⁵³ CECR, "Message des Évêques Catholiques du Rwanda aux prêtres, religieux et religieuses, 21 November 1991: Au service de l'Eglise dans une société de multipartisme," in CECR, *Recueil des lettres et messages*, 181, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 203 n. 15 (p. 321).

righteousness' (Matthew 5:10)."¹⁵⁴ Owing to their stance, such communities are likely to exist in constant tension with the state.

The nature of ethnic and political violence of Rwandan history reveals that mere rhetoric and slogans for the causes of social justice, democracy, national unity, or the liberation of the poor, have proven inadequate. It challenges the church to be more vocal about underlying causes, ethical challenges, and the scandal of violence in its demand that truth, justice, and tolerance become the foundations of society, and for a life centered on love and non-violent life.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, a "politics of neutrality" or a strict pacifist position by the church is not a lesson to draw from the Rwandan genocide. The church should be specific rather than generic in denouncing violence, as well as in holding state leaders accountable for their actions.¹⁵⁶

5.3.4 Catholic Reconciliation in Post-genocidal Rwanda

In the aftermath of the genocide, Rwanda began the process of reconciliation and healing at the local and national level. While the Catholic Church in Rwanda can never fully redeem herself for her complicity in the genocide, she can play a role in local and national reconciliation. Robert Schreiter affirms that the Catholic Church can offer three key contributions to social reconciliation—a spirituality of reconciliation based on the gospels, deep ritual and sacramental resources, and the potential to create local communities of healing characterized by hope, memory, and trust.¹⁵⁷ One such example, *Caritas Gisenyi* offers housing to the displaced, counseling for those suffering from trauma, microcredit projects, as well as opportunities for

¹⁵⁴ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 203-204.

¹⁵⁵ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 204; Ngomanzungu, *Efforts in Médiation*, 81, in Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 205.

¹⁵⁶ Carney, *Rwanda before the Genocide*, 205.

¹⁵⁷ Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 15, in Carney, "A Generation after Genocide," 791.

prisoners indicted in acts of genocide to ask for forgiveness from affected families. Its most important work is trying to unite the Hutu and Tutsi.¹⁵⁸

Healing the brokenness after the genocide is a long nonlinear journey that must address underlying issues that are helpful in getting past Hutu-Tutsi hostility. Reconciliation is not a quick fix and does not take refuge in prayers alone. It requires compassion and care, but never apart from the struggle for justice.¹⁵⁹ Given the level of trauma experienced on both sides, trust and forgiveness seem almost impossible, but as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of post-apartheid South Africa has exemplified, listening to the painful stories and each other's "memory of affliction,"¹⁶⁰ and acknowledging their truth would be a giant step toward building trust. In Rwanda, there are two groups with legitimate grievances whose painful memories require attention, sometimes making it difficult to identify whom to forgive. Grey writes that remembering does not presume reclaiming a glorious past, but is metanoic in its humility and willingness to bear witness to the truth of the other side.¹⁶¹ Reconciliation requires honest, sustained, and hopeful commitment at all layers, and an openness to God. Catholic reconciliation in Rwanda is a reminder of the fundamental human dependence on God for life, sustenance, mercy, and the grace to forgive and restore relationships.¹⁶²

Thomson writes that the 1995 Kibeho massacre was a setback to the reconciliation process. Many Hutu and Tutsi who had lived through the genocide no longer believed in promises of democratization and political transparency. The blindness of the international

¹⁵⁸ Grey, *To Rwanda and Back*, 143.

¹⁵⁹ Grey, *To Rwanda and Back*, 61.

¹⁶⁰ Grey, *To Rwanda and Back*, 9. Grey uses Jean-Baptist Metz' "memory of affliction" concept that includes the memory of suffering and memory of liberation. When related to Christ's suffering and redemptive action in the past, remembering can become part of the redemptive action in the present.

¹⁶¹ Grey, *To Rwanda and Back*, 16-19.

¹⁶² Carney, "A Generation after Genocide," 811.

community appeared willful and overly accommodating to the RPF.¹⁶³ In times of tragedy, people turn to religion for reflection and interior healing. Christians flock to church despite the human failings of her constituents. In the Church, Christ mediates forgiveness through his Spirit, and the Spirit as the unifying principle brings about reconciliation. Christ's presence alongside the impoverished and the oppressed reminds people of his preferential option for the poor and the need for the Church to accompany society in times of turmoil and calm.¹⁶⁴

Lastly, Hubert Locke reminds Christians that forgiveness and reconciliation are the core teachings of the Gospel, but do not override the principles of justice. Forgiveness is rooted in scripture, reinforced by liturgy and the sacraments and is the basis for renewing relationships. Reconciliation is a means of overcoming omissions and errors of the past and is essential if traumatized communities are to move beyond crisis and upheaval.¹⁶⁵ Locke cautions that Churches must not lose sight of the victim's rights when broaching the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation. Justice may precede in parallel with or even preclude these processes until the perpetrators have paid their due. Finally, speaking for victims, Locke asks, if the Church can dispense forgiveness to those who perpetrated genocide, a power given to her by Christ through the priesthood. It is a perplexing question the Church has wrestled with and continues to do so in light of other ecclesial problems of the contemporary age.¹⁶⁶

5.3.5 Rwandan History, the Apparitions and the Theological

Is it possible to reconcile the 1994 Rwanda genocide and its history of violence and massacres with the theological? This is a difficult question to answer given that the very social

¹⁶³ Thomson, *Rwanda*, 93.

¹⁶⁴ Gatwa, "Resisting Democracy in Rwanda," 203.

¹⁶⁵ Hubert G. Locke, "Religion and the Rwandan Genocide: Some Preliminary Considerations," in Rittner et al., *Genocide in Rwanda*, 34.

¹⁶⁶ Locke, "Religion and the Rwandan Genocide," 34-35.

and ecclesial structures in place to protect faithful citizens were complicit in facilitating or perpetrating these crimes. The *imago Dei* symbol is the Christian foundation of all relationships. The gospel proclaims the praxis of love, conversion, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation in sustaining these relationships. These are the elements of the messages of the Mother of the Word at Kibeho, with the singular apocalyptic vision serving as a salutary warning. Therefore, acknowledgment of guilt and repentance is the first step toward reconciliation and the way forward for the future peaceful cohabitation of the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. In *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II issued a challenge to all Africans to reject a way of living that does not correspond to the best of their traditions. He urged them to look to the riches of their traditions that lead them to the truth. He observes that hostility endangers peace as well as the pursuit of the common good of society. Various forms of division heal through honest dialogue. John Paul II emphasized the importance of dialogue with African traditional religion, Islam, and other Christian churches. Affirming that the Church in Africa stands resolutely with the oppressed, the voiceless, and the marginalized, he acknowledged the winds of change sweeping across the continent where Africans are demanding and promoting human rights and freedoms.¹⁶⁷ Following the gospel message does not mean ignoring the victims of the genocide. Legal arbitration of justice for victims is possible alongside the healing process of reconciliation. Therefore, the Hutu and the Tutsi must free themselves of the hostility that persists, seeing in each other the *imago Dei*, and that they are one community.

This chapter examined the serial private and public apparitions of the Virgin Mary to the three approved visionaries of Kibeho and the messages and mission entrusted to each. It also

¹⁶⁷ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission toward the Year 2000 *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), §44, §48-49, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html.

studied the civil genocide of 1994 and the massacre at Kibeho camp a year later. On one hand, it can be argued that the horrific events of 1994-1995 were simply a part of Rwanda's history of Hutu-Tutsi conflict with the apparitions at Kibeho having no bearing. On the other, the reported visions to Alphonsine, Anathalie and Marie-Claire on August 19, 1982 as well as to Ivanka Ivankovic on June 25, 1983 in Medjugorje have led some to associate the genocide with the Virgin's prophetic anticipation of impending horror. However, attributing the genocide of 1994 or the Kibeho massacre of 1995 or both to the fact that Rwandans ignored Our Lady's message to repent, to pray, to recite the Rosary, to fast, or to turn to God with contrite hearts is a questionable proposition. These counterarguments notwithstanding, the apparitions at Kibeho have important implications for the local and world church in that they are a simple call for the conversion of humanity and a return to the fundamentals of the gospel.

Having completed a historical-critical study of three apparitions—Vailankanni, Zeitoun, and Kibeho, a look at the implications of these cases and the wider study of apparitions on ecclesial life is the objective of Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

Implications of Marian Apparitions and Manifestations for the People of God

When Paul VI adjourned Vatican II on November 21, 1964, the same day he promulgated *Lumen gentium*, he declared Mary, Mother and Exemplar of the Church.¹ Fifty-three years later, on February 11, 2018, Francis decreed that Mary Mother of the Church become a feast in the Universal Church's liturgical calendar and celebrated on the Monday after Pentecost.² That the celebration of this feast is the day after Pentecost underscores Mary's harmony with the Holy Spirit and her role in the Church. In a pastoral letter on evangelization, Cardinal Seán O'Malley writes, "Pentecost is born out of an intense experience of prayer in union with Mary and with Peter. The experience of Pentecost is one of unity and joy that transcends all ethnic and linguistic differences and is an expression of God's universal love."³ Chapter 1 laid the foundation for understanding the implementation of the Spirit's action in Mary, a Catholic proposition about which Protestants have reservations. They complain that throughout Christian history, the Catholic Church has attributed to Mary what belongs to the Holy Spirit, according her numerous titles befitting only the Spirit. While it is necessary, according to Congar, to acknowledge the possible accuracy of such criticisms about Catholic teaching on Mary, "it is [also] very important to remain conscious of the deep bond that exists between the Virgin Mary and the Spirit, and consequently of a certain common function despite the absolute disparity of the conditions."⁴ He argues that even if one sets aside the effusive language of praise

¹ Vollert, *Theology of Mary*, 13.

² Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Decretum de Celebratione Beatae Mariae Virginis Ecclesiae Matris in Calendario Romano Generali*, 11 February 2018, at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20180211_decreto-mater-ecclesiae_la.html.

³ Seán P. O'Malley, "A New Pentecost: Inviting All to Follow Jesus," Pastoral Letter on Evangelization, June 12, 2011, <https://www.bostoncatholic.org/pentecostletter.aspx> (accessed January 13, 2019).

⁴ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit Volume I*, 163.

used to honor Mary, one must not ignore the profound relationship that exists between the Spirit and her, a relationship that derives from Christian mystery itself.⁵

The documented case studies on apparitions in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 reveal how a small Marian cult can evolve into a center of Catholic spirituality. The manifestation of the Spirit's work through Mary's cosmic mystery has far-reaching and profound implications for ecclesial life. Laurentin states that the messages of apparitions make known the hidden potential of the gospel that the future will unfold in that they do not simply restate what Scripture reveals, but deal with a particular time and a particular place. They adapt Christian revelation to localized, particular challenges in new situations. Therefore, he claims apparitions have a dual function—permanent and prophetic⁶ as briefly introduced in Chapter 2. This chapter addresses the implications of Marian apparitions in terms of this dual function in two sections.

The *permanent* function examines how the repetitive nature of Mary's appeals during her apparitions reawakens faith and gives deeper meaning to these events for the spiritual life of the people of God. Most apparition messages carry the traditional gospel themes of prayer, fasting, repentance, reconciliation, and conversion. Some messages are apocalyptic with warnings for the local church. Laurentin, however, cautions that one must not judge an apparition by the astonishing tone of its message because even the most banal message can sometimes transform a person's life or reach thousands of believers all over the world, Medjugorje being the most striking example in recent times. The fact is that most apparitions are not apocalyptic and simply offer an invitation to take seriously the living presence of God among the people. In this section, attention is paid to Marian pilgrimage and its impact on faith as well as the emergence of Marian movements resulting from apparitions.

⁵ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit Volume I*, 164, 166 n. 23.

⁶ Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 117.

The *prophetic* function addresses the educative impact of apparitions on aspects central to the *imago Dei*—Christian and interreligious unity, equality for all God’s people, God’s justice, and the preferential option for the poor. The prophetic function varies in degree from apparition to apparition. This section pays particular attention to encounter as a mode of evangelization in bringing about ecumenical and interreligious unity.

6.1 PERMANENT FUNCTION: Implications of Marian Apparitions on Devotion and Piety

In general, critics of Mary, Marian minimalists, and even some maximalists are dismissive of the phenomenon of apparitions as a product of human fabrication intended to justify Marian doctrine and devotion. While some of the charges of excessive devotion leveled against Catholics merit reevaluation of Marian devotional practices, it is important to pay attention to what is happening at these sites of Mary’s intervention in human history. Vailankanni, Zeitoun, and Kibeho are only three examples studied here, but the Virgin’s appearances have also rekindled the *sensus fidelium* at Czestochowa, Guadalupe, Rue du Bac, Lourdes, La Salette, Pontmain, Fátima, Knock, Medjugorje, and many other locations around the world. With so many apparitions and the millions who flock to these sites, it is surprising that more contemporary scholars are not writing about apparitions and even fewer about their impact on the local and world Church. The subject of modern pilgrimage that has infused earlier chapters is key to analyzing the impact of apparitions on the faith of the local and world church.

6.1.1 The Transformative Power of Modern Pilgrimage

Sample Pilgrim Statistics

Every year millions of pilgrims travel to the sites of Marian apparitions.⁷ Statistics from 2011 indicate that annually 4 million pilgrims arrive in Lourdes and this number is growing by ten percent each year. The number of pilgrims in organized pilgrimages to Lourdes peaked in 2008 for the sesquicentenary of the apparitions, tallying at approximately 1.47 million for the celebrations alone.⁸ At Fátima, the annual estimate is 4-5 million, but for the centennial in 2016-2017, the number grew to 5.3 million, with organized pilgrimages showing a growth of approximately 18% over the prior year.⁹ A large number of pilgrims also travel to La Salette each year, though statistics are not readily available, but the numbers are likely to be significantly less than Lourdes and Fátima owing to the difficulty in reaching this destination high up in the Alps. Reports for Zeitoun and Kibeho generalize pilgrim numbers in the thousands especially around the feast day of these apparitions. Going further back in time, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) has an annual pilgrim estimate for Guadalupe at 20 million in 2011,¹⁰ when 5.3 million took part in the 480th anniversary of the apparitions.¹¹ Matching Guadalupe, Vailankanni draws an estimated 20 million pilgrims who visit the Shrine Basilica annually¹² of which 3 million arrive for the patronal festival.¹³ The same 2011 ARC report also estimates that annually 5 million visit Jasna Góra, in Czestochowa, Poland, to honor the Black Madonna. These

⁷ All figures are estimates as pilgrimage sites do not require registration except when organized pilgrimages need assistance for the use of the sanctuary's facilities.

⁸ See <https://www.statista.com/statistics/764559/number-pilgrims-heavy/> (accessed February 10, 2019).

⁹ See <https://www.papa2017.fatima.pt/en/pages/fatima-2016> (accessed February 10, 2019).

¹⁰ Alliance of Religions and Conservation, "Pilgrim Numbers," Bath, United Kingdom, December 19, 2011, <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=500> (accessed March 30, 2019).

¹¹ Inquirer, "5.3 million take part in Mexico Pilgrimage," December 13, 2011, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/110109/5-3-million-take-part-in-mexico-pilgrimage> (accessed March 30, 2019).

¹² Catholic World News, "Hindus join in India's Marian pilgrimage," September 3, 2007, <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/features/index.cfm?recnum=53261> (accessed 11 February 2019).

¹³ George Iype, "Velankanni: Death in the Churchyard," December 28, 2004, <https://www.rediff.com/news/2004/dec/28iype1.htm> (accessed February 11, 2019).

are only a few examples, but millions of pilgrims throughout the world are gravitating to other Marian apparition shrines and basilicas as well.

Why Marian Pilgrimages?

The aforementioned pilgrim statistics raise the question: What draws people to these Marian shrines and basilicas, and why? One possible explanation is that the apparition stories of faith and reports of miraculous healings captivate and inspire contemporary Catholics who wish to see faith in action. They want to witness the places where God has intervened in the lives of ordinary folk. During the Middle Ages, the principal places of pilgrimages—the Holy Land, Rome, and Compostella had as their object Christ or the apostles. Today, Marian shrines and basilicas, especially those connected with apparitions, draw the largest number of pilgrims.¹⁴ In the modern and postmodern age, pilgrimage has increasingly become a mode of religious expression with the power to mobilize the faithful and deepen the spirituality of the Church. Laurentin observes in one of his later writings that for the faithful, “the underlying need is for a lived contact with God in action, a gift of self, a community wherein one finds drive, fervor, and hope. This is what many Christians think they find in these heavenly apparitions.”¹⁵

The objective of undertaking pilgrimage varies from person-to-person and community-to-community. Catholics go on pilgrimage as a sign of grace, to offer a petition, or to thank Jesus and his Mother for favors granted. At Vailankanni, Hindus arrive at the Shrine Basilica because they are drawn to the Mother-Child image at the altar. Images of Hindu goddesses with a child in arms are rare. Some mothers feel that they identify with this maternal image. Hindu women find that Vailankanni offers them solutions to life’s daily problems that their goddesses do not.

¹⁴ Laurentin, *Question of Mary*, 9.

¹⁵ Rene Laurentin, *Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie*, in RSPT 54 (1970), 313, in Neumann, “Decline of Interest in Mariology,” 36.

Though Hindus outnumber Christians at this site, what takes place at Vailankanni does not transfer to their local domicile. Hindus do not return home resolved to pray at local churches consequent to their pilgrimage. Christians and Muslim pilgrims visit Zeitoun to preserve the memory of the apparitions owing to their common reverence for the Mother of Jesus. Kibeho pilgrimages have a dual purpose—to commemorate the joys of the apparitions and to pay tribute to the victims of the genocide, many seeing an intrinsic connection between these events.

Laurentin also suggests that in today's cultural framework, Christians are dissatisfied with the abstract and formal teaching that characterizes preaching and ecclesiastical administration, and that Marian apparition sites offer pilgrims a glimpse of the gospel in action.¹⁶ Though one may agree that pilgrimage centers are sites of divine initiative, it is difficult to reconcile pilgrimages as effects that flow from Laurentin's premise. The typical pilgrim is not thinking intellectually when she or he undertakes these sacred journeys. It is possible that Catholics are disillusioned with their Church, but they do not undertake pilgrimages as a result of despondency. It is not as though these centers of Marian spirituality exist apart from the Church to where pilgrims retreat. What pilgrimages reaffirm is the faith of Catholics in Jesus Christ who bequeathed his mother to humanity.

Pilgrimage in the Postmodern Age

New modes of transport, modern hotels and lodgings, and the presence of health and medical care facilities at apparition sites give pilgrimages a modern feel. A review of some of the popular pilgrimage websites like Guadalupe, Lourdes, La Salette, and Fátima¹⁷ show that travel and accommodations can be booked ahead of time through the internet. Information on programs, activities, and special events is instantaneously available on the official website of the

¹⁶ Laurentin, *Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie*, 313.

¹⁷ See webliography for links to official websites of these sanctuaries.

sanctuary. Pilgrims may also offer petitions via the website or the sanctuary's mobile app that provides all sorts of information. One can shop for medals, rosaries, prayer cards, statues, replicas of Mary appearing to the visionaries, or of the sanctuary itself through online stores. Virtual reality offers something for everyone, especially those who may not be in a position to travel to these far-off destinations for reasons of affordability, disability, frailty, or contentment with being a pilgrim from a distance. These technological advances have altered devotional paradigms leading to changing attitudes and experiences of the modern pilgrim.

6.1.2 Shifting Focus and Agency

Emma Anderson writes that beginning in the 19th century, the focus on Mary's spiritual suffering on behalf of humanity rather than on Jesus' physical suffering for its redemption may have been responsible for the shift from physical to spiritual agency.¹⁸ The 19th and 20th centuries, she claims saw a shift from an intermingling of the physical and metaphysical to more metaphorical and psychological models. The type of suffering experienced by seers shifts from the purely physical to deeper inner tribulation that mirrors that of the Virgin. La Salette and Kibeho are examples of this shift. Earlier the suffering of the Virgin and the seer were not generally syncretistic; the seer may experience suffering at the hand of a punitive figure (like a parent) or other tribulation. However, Anderson reminds us that the "spiritual" suffering of seers is always inferior to that of the Virgin.¹⁹

Marian movements arising out of apparitions reflect a continuity in traditional Catholic practices including devotion to Mary, novenas, the Rosary, Adoration, and the Eucharist.²⁰ However, modern apparitions have brought about change from earlier paradigms in terms of

¹⁸ Anderson, "Changing Devotional Paradigms," 101.

¹⁹ Anderson, "Changing Devotional Paradigms," 101.

²⁰ Jill Krebs, "Transposing Devotion: Tradition and Innovation in Marian Apparitions," *Nova-Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 19, no. 3 (2016): 31-53.

experience, attitudes, and devotion. Transposition of the old and the new are part of the lived experience of apparitions. Jill Krebs writes that modern apparitions contain new aspects in which tradition and innovation transpose each other; innovation builds from tradition and makes tradition new.²¹

Dichotomies of Experiences and Attitudes

Some apparition messages are apocalyptic in content. Mary exhorts her visionaries to repentance and prayer to avoid catastrophic consequences. Sara Horsfall argues that apparitions are not an escape to an ideal world; their messages are a call to the wider context, even the whole world to shun evil. For example, Fátima inspired the formation of the Blue Army of Mary to counter the communist Red Army. The movement developed a Reparation to repair the blasphemies perpetrated against Mary's Immaculate Heart, a dichotomy of good banishing evil. Horsfall identifies another dichotomy of religious experience and attitude. A patriarchal approach to Marian devotion assigns to Mary the attributes of mercy and forgiveness, healing and comfort, and to Christ the function as judge.²² For this reason, Catholics see Mary as mediating mercy and forgiveness on their behalf before her Son who is the ultimate judge and mediator. A third dichotomy of apparitional experience is that of the visionaries' alertness and state of consciousness that formerly took place in "liminal space." The pattern of modern apparitional experience is serial, public, and interiorized. In the new paradigm, other witnesses can be close to the seer while he or she is engaged in mystical communication making the apparition a public event.²³ Carole Cusack argues that modern-day apparitions have changed considerably in that the visionary now sees and converses with Mary publicly and continuously

²¹ Krebs, "Transposing Devotion," 36.

²² Horsfall, "Experience of Marian Apparitions and the Mary Cult," 382.

²³ Anderson, "Changing Devotional Paradigms," 101-102.

rather than privately over a finite period.²⁴ During her apparitions reports claim Mary commented on local and global problems, and advised on how people ought to live their lives, manifesting the presence and power of the divine working through her.²⁵ Of the three cases, Kibeho is an example of this new development where private revelations become public events.

Transposition of Innovation and Tradition

Technological innovations like the internet have radically transformed pilgrimage experience in the postmodern age. Paolo Apolito affirms that miraculous events and messages received from Mary now include the virtual though he also acknowledges that the virtual does not replace reality.²⁶ This also means that Marian apparitions are no longer the domain of the Catholic world alone. Where and to who Mary appears does not depend on the context or the visionaries being Catholic. Vailankanni and Zeitoun serve as examples where Mary has appeared to Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Kathleen McPhillips states that other Christian communities like the Egyptian Copts have appropriated these sites and rites.²⁷ Citing Apolito, Janet Kahl writes that the web propagates apparition messages rapidly and involves many more unconnected people who do not share a physical journey as one would to the actual sites.²⁸ The downside to the web experience is the loss of this sense of *communitas* among pilgrims traveling together.²⁹ For those choosing virtual reality, the journey is solo and without

²⁴ Carole M. Cusack, "The Virgin at Coogee: a preliminary investigation," *Australian Religious Studies Review* 16, no. 1 (2003): 117, in Janet Kahl, "Recent Developments in the Academic Study of the Cult of the Virgin Mary," *Journal of Religious History* 33, no. 3 (September 2009): 379.

²⁵ Halemba, *Negotiating Marian Apparitions*, 268.

²⁶ Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*, trans. Antony Shugaar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 77, in Kahl, "Recent Developments," 380.

²⁷ Kathleen McPhillips, "Believing in post-modernity: technologies of enchantment in contemporary Marian Devotion," in *Popular Spiritualities: The Politics of Contemporary Enchantment*, eds. Lynne Hume and Kathleen McPhillips (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 148-49, in Kahl, "Recent Developments," 380.

²⁸ Apolito, *Internet and the Madonna*, 152, in Kahl, "Recent Developments," 380.

²⁹ Victor Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* 12, no. 3 (1973): 192, 201, in Kahl, "Recent Developments," 380.

hardship rather than communal and physical.³⁰ Internet surfers arrive at official Marian apparition websites through links on non-Catholic and New Age websites. This allows traditional shrines to flourish by providing these surfers access to maps, books, and details on how to get there.³¹ Sanctuary websites create a sort of “reverse pilgrimage”³² because pilgrims have access to photo galleries and video links that transport them virtually inside shrines for novenas, Eucharistic celebrations, and Adoration through live streaming or recording.

Religious Pilgrim or Secular Tourist?

Among the throngs of people at Marian apparition sites are tourists, some of who are the faithful that combine pilgrimage with vacation, while others who are simply curious about the story. It is not often easy to distinguish between “religious pilgrims” and “secular tourists.” Ellen Badone and Sharon Roseman present Valene Smith’s argument that though pilgrims often use the same infrastructure as tourists and can undertake sacred journeys only if they have financial means and leisure time that such travel encapsulates they should not be collapsed into a broad category of ‘traveler’ as the two lie at either end of a conceptual spectrum.³³ Somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, there lies a fusion of “religious tourism,” where vacationers frequent pilgrimage shrines rather than undertake pilgrimage journeys.

Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, Erik Cohen and Dean MacCannell claim that pre-modern pilgrims moved from the outside to toward sacred centers of pilgrimage while people journeying for non-instrumental purposes moved toward the “other” located at the peripheries. The new

³⁰ Apolito, *Internet and the Madonna*, 118, in Kahl, “Recent Developments,” 380.

³¹ Cusack, “The Virgin at Coogee,” 118, in Kahl, “Recent Developments,” 381-82.

³² The notion of “reverse pilgrimage” was first used in connection with the traveling “International Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fátima” outside of Portugal and Spain. Internet access gives this notion a newer experience of pilgrimage in which the apparition shrine comes home to the pilgrim rather than the traditional reverse.

³³ Valene Smith, “Pilgrimage and Tourism: The Quest in Guest,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 19: 1-17, in *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*, eds. Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 10.

devotional paradigm transforms these structural differences. Tourists who used to retreat from centers of industry and finance, frequently create new centers in the former peripheral locations and emerge as the new variety of “pilgrim-tourists.”³⁴

Not only are religious and tourist journeys continuously evolving, the destinations are themselves transforming into centers of mobility. On feast days and milestone anniversary dates in particular, mass pilgrimage has taken on deep cultural significance in the postmodern age. The religious significance, deep histories, and routinized itineraries supplemented by printed guidebooks, oral narratives of previous pilgrims, and other cultural signs have made pilgrims self-conscious about their journeys to pilgrimage centers like shrines and sites of the supernatural. The comforts of the modern age raises questions about the authenticity of pilgrimage as compared with the arduous sacred journeys of the pre-modern pilgrim. Tourism as opposed to spiritual motivations for undertaking pilgrimage, or using luxurious as opposed to public transport to get to these sacred centers appear to invalidate or lessen the spirit of personal sacrifice that are part of the spiritual experience.³⁵ Erasmus would certainly agree!

6.1.3 Changing Devotional Paradigms

Messages that accompanied Marian apparitions in the 19th and 20th centuries reflected the signs of the times. Anderson claims that compared with apparitions of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance that never challenged the predominant worldview, those of the last two centuries overtly rebuked Enlightenment and modernity—rationalism, materialism, and the emphasis on human prowess. She writes that these later apparitions privileged poverty, simplicity, humility, the feminine, and the rural over the powerful, the modern, and the urban

³⁴ Badone and Roseman, *Intersecting Journeys*, 10-11. For the work of Eliade, Turner, Cohen, and MacCannell, see pp. 19-23.

³⁵ Badone and Roseman, *Intersecting Journeys*, 11.

while obliquely criticizing secular values and drawing attention to new themes that induced and reshaped the devotional experience of their traditional paradigms.³⁶ Though Anderson writes in the context of La Salette in the 19th century, the themes she addresses are an amalgam of earlier apparition motifs also characteristic of later apparitions.

From Peasant Catholicism to New Age Channeling

In the 19th century, the Marian devout mostly lived in rural and suburban areas close to shrines of Marian apparitions seeing themselves as privileged because of their proximity to these sanctuaries. They are conservative Catholics who support church politics and adhere to traditional forms of worship. As the messages of Marian apparitions changed, a more apocalyptic Catholicism replaced peasant Catholicism. Zimdars-Swartz writes that apparitions refashioned peasant Catholicism into a new age mysticism.³⁷ Zaniello identifies Medjugorje as a model of this new age channeling in two respects. First, as with Zeitoun and Kibeho, Mary's appearances became serial. She returned several times to the location in front of the same witnesses with thousands of people converging to see her or to witness some supernatural phenomena such as disturbances in solar light, flashes of other lights, the presence of perfume, or the changing color of rosary beads. In the second trend, the Spirit speaks through Mary to a specific intermediary. The private revelation is for that person's benefit, but does not prohibit the person from spreading the message unless restricted. When there is a human crisis, Mary urges the visionary to go public with her message. In this way, Zaniello affirms new age channeling and private revelation in combination with folklore experiences create an ongoing rhythm of apocalypse common to both Catholic and non-Catholic religious groups.³⁸

³⁶ Anderson, "Changing Devotional Paradigms," 119.

³⁷ Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 166, in Zaniello, "Cyberspace and the Virgin," 82. Also, discussed in Fernandes, "Mary," 25-26.

³⁸ Zaniello, "Cyberspace and the Virgin," 83, 86; Fernandes, "Mary," 26.

Growing Importance of Marian Shrines and Basilicas

What is happening at Marian shrines and basilicas is a visible sign of the movement of the Spirit in the Church. Devotion at these shrines has been of central importance in the daily life of a number of Catholics over the centuries, and with apparitions showing no sign of abating, this trend will likely continue.³⁹ Statistics quoted earlier indicate that the faithful flock to Marian sanctuaries in no small numbers. Even shrines and churches built simply in honor of Mary attract an immense following as witnessed at Our Lady Help of Christians at Marian Valley in Queensland, Australia,⁴⁰ and St. Michael's Church in Mahim, Mumbai, where Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsees, and followers of almost every faith flock for round-the-clock novenas to Mary Help of Christians every Wednesday. What is it that draws pilgrims, observers, and tourists to these churches?

Based on a letter issued by the central committee for the celebration of the 1987-1988 Marian Year, Thompson identifies five reasons. Shrines are firstly a place of worship where the Eucharistic celebration culminates as the primary goal of pilgrimage. Second, a Marian shrine fosters cultural development. The letter states, "The history, traditions, and the art of the shrine contribute to the *via pulchritudinis* and to the contemplation of God's beauty revealed in Mary." Third, a Marian shrine is a place for promoting vocations. It is a sign of God's call and a person's response. Fourth, it is a place of charity. A number of shrines are engaged in works of charity in hospitals, schools for the underprivileged, and homes for the sick, expressing God's concern for the poor as recalled in the Magnificat. Lastly, with Protestants reevaluating their position with respect to Mary, a Marian shrine rather than be a place of contention among Christians, can

³⁹ Michael P. Carroll, "Visions of the Virgin Mary: The Effect of Family Structures on Marian Apparitions," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, no. 3 (1983): 207.

⁴⁰ Peter Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady: A Guide to Fifty of the World's Most Famous Marian Shrines* (London: Piatkus, 1998), 28, in Kahl, "Recent Developments," 379.

become a center for ecumenism.⁴¹ Another document “The Shrine” released for the Jubilee Year 2000, calls a Marian shrine a “Tent of Encounter,” a place of divine presence, a sign of hope, and a memorial born of divine initiative reflecting God’s action in history.⁴²

As mentioned in Chapter 1, shrines and basilicas dedicated to Mary are surrounded by shops selling medals, scapulars, images, and other religious souvenirs, a distinctly modern feature of pilgrimage made popular with the casting of the Miraculous Medal requested by Mary during her 1830 apparition to Catherine Labouré.⁴³ The function these objects serve depends on the attitude and needs of the pilgrim. For example, medals from Lourdes may contain water from the spring or may have touched the grotto. Pilgrims may treat them like relics, an instrument of devotion. Some pilgrims purchase souvenirs because they identify with the plight of the visionary who through her or his story offers hope and consolation. Worth pointing out is that the majority of ailing pilgrims never get cured as a result of pilgrimage. Bernadette was never cured of her illness, and may be a comfort by sharing her destiny with those not cured.⁴⁴ Taking home religious souvenirs also suggests that the holy in Catholic tradition can be delocalized. Lourdes water is efficient anywhere and is reproducible. Along the same lines, Lourdes shrines worldwide become sacred because they participate in the Lourdes story.⁴⁵

Shrines dedicated to Mary are not limited to the Christian realm. Little known outside the Islamic world is that every mosque (including the Hagia Sophia) has Qur’anic verses related

⁴¹ Central Committee for the Marian Year 1987-1988, *The Ecclesial Role of Marian Shrines*, October 7, 1987, in Thompson, “Pilgrimage and Shrines,” 122-123.

⁴² Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, “The Shrine” (8 May 1999) at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_19990525_shrine_en.html, in Thompson, “Pilgrimage and Shrines,” 126-127.

⁴³ Eli Heldaas Seland, “Medals representing nineteenth-century Marian apparitions,” in *Devotional Cultures of European Christianity, 1790-1960*, eds. Henning Laugerud and Salvador Ryan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 76-80.

⁴⁴ Seland, “Medals representing nineteenth-century Marian apparitions,” 84-85.

⁴⁵ Seland, “Medals representing nineteenth-century Marian apparitions,” 89.

to Mary inscribed on the mihrab. In 2016, a mosque named “al-Sayyida Maryam” was built in Tartous, Syria, and in 2017, a mosque in Abu Dhabi was renamed “Mary, Mother of Jesus Mosque” as part of an initiative for the peaceful co-existence of religions in the U.A.E.

The Internet and the Propagation of Apparitional Messages

The internet has also created a global community that propagates Marian messages, particularly those that are apocalyptic like Garabandal (1961) and Medjugorje (1981). Apolito proposes three conditions for reporting apparitions—existence of an effective media network, freedom to disseminate the information, and context that encourages diffusion of the report.⁴⁶ Apocalyptic messages propagate rapidly because they project a gloomy outlook that the sins of humanity and ideological failures have advanced the end times. For this global community according to Apolito, Mary offers a solution, providing structure in a world without any strong ideologies. She promises order and deliverance where there is disorder and uncertainty.⁴⁷

Countering the Feminist and Modern Critique

Mother of Health, Mother of Light, and Mother of the Word in the titles of the three case studies highlights the importance of Mary’s biological and spiritual motherhood. Contemporary feminist scholars criticize the cult of Mary as promoting the role of mother as the highest ideal of womanhood. However, there is more that Catholics see in Mary than just her motherhood. For them, she is the refuge of sinners, the comforter of the afflicted, and the hope of the hopeless revealing the Spirit’s own implementation in her person as the Mother of God. She guides the immoral, and even those who do not seek her help. Among the devout that undertake Marian pilgrimages is the modern woman. This counters the feminist critique that Mary has declined in relevance to the modern woman. The collective belief among all kinds of pilgrims (including the

⁴⁶ Apolito, *Internet and the Madonna*, 24-25, in Kahl, “Recent Developments,” 381.

⁴⁷ Apolito, *Internet and the Madonna*, 99-100, in Kahl, “Recent Developments,” 380-81.

modern woman) is Mary's ability to intercede on their behalf, help them, and bring about inner healing. The strength of this belief led to the flourishing of these shrines even before the advent of the Marian Age, and this trend shows no sign of languishing in the postmodern period.⁴⁸

The misconception that Marian pilgrimages are anti-modern is contrary to the experience of the contemporary pilgrim. While Marian pilgrimages still preserve centuries-old traditions like novenas for the observance of feasts, candlelight processions, crowning of Mary, recitation of the Rosary, singing Marian hymns and so forth, they do take on a modern sensibility made largely possible by aforementioned infrastructural development and advances in technology. Having addressed the influence of technology on pilgrimage earlier, attention turns next to the impact of modern pilgrimage on the common pilgrim.

6.1.4 Pilgrimage: A Source of Empowerment or Suppression?

Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans affirm that modern pilgrimage draws attention to social inequalities that direct pilgrims to seek Mary's spiritual protection material to their situation in life and their specific problems in the world. Many pilgrims believe that she provides answers to their problems and empowers them to improve their lives. At the forefront of each apparition narrative are the visionaries who themselves constitute the primary category of pilgrims. In their encounter, Mary upholds their dignity and personhood, empowering and emboldening them in their mission to carry out the task entrusted to them. Laurentin suggests the case of the 1531 Marian apparition to the Aztec Juan Diego that reminded the Spaniards that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God. Indians are as worthy and capable as Spaniards of bringing divine messages to those in authority. He argues that in empowering her visionaries, Mary gives priority to the poor. She upsets the hierarchical

⁴⁸ Kahl, "Recent Developments," 378-379.

order between who is to command and who is to obey, and makes clear that the Church in Latin America is first the home of the native Indians and then to colonizers and others.⁴⁹ Vailankanni, La Salette, Lourdes, Fátima, and Kibeho are just a few of many instances where sociocultural means are used to marginalize people. In this process, Hermkens et al. clarify how old and new Marian symbols are put to work in Marian pilgrimages.⁵⁰ They write that Marian pilgrimages

exemplify how in modern times cultural means are employed to oppress others or resist oppression. Religion continues to be a way in which people deal with constraining and violating power inequalities caused by processes of globalization, secularization, gender discrimination, colonialism, violence, economic exploitation, insecurity, changing and disintegrating family structures, and biomedical dominance in health systems. Marian devotion simultaneously uses modernity *and* acts against certain outcomes of modernity. It helps people—both powerful and powerless—to position themselves in changing modern power relations.⁵¹

Following Victor and Edith Turner's work in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978), Hermkens et al. explicate their usage of the term *communitas* that describes the egalitarian spirit of pilgrims at a sacred site, turning pilgrimage into a movement away from the injustices of social structures and everyday life to one that is religious and without boundaries. Pilgrimage, the Turners assert, helps bring people of different ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds together breaking down barriers among pilgrims, making them "liminoid" and "antistructural."⁵²

Marian pilgrimages have evolved into experiences of spiritual renewal and communal bonding with other pilgrims, but experiences of empowerment and liberation varies from person-to-person. Not everyone believes that she or he emerges from a pilgrimage experience an empowered person. While Marian pilgrimages can be empowering experiences according to some writers, others contest the generalization of such claims. Peter Jan Margry, in discussing

⁴⁹ Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 117-118.

⁵⁰ Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans, eds., *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 2-3.

⁵¹ Hermkens et al., *Moved by Mary*, 2.

⁵² Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 34, in Hermkens et al., *Moved by Mary*, 3.

the paradoxes of ideology and gender in the contested devotions of Our Lady of All Nations, asks whether these apparitions constitute a threat to the Catholic Church. “The hierarchy,” Margry writes, “remains wary of incorporating this movement [Army of Mary] and its contested ideology in order to prevent the process of deinstitutionalization, although the apparitional network partly relies on the chain of memory of Catholicism itself.”⁵³ In the ideology of this cult, Mary is elevated far above her traditional roles of “caring mother” and “mediatrix.” This cult highlights the growing importance and dominance of female-run prayer groups, female visionaries, and congregations where women predominate in the Church. It also plays into gender politics of Church leadership that is largely patriarchal and dogmatically male.⁵⁴ Therefore, when talking about Marian pilgrimage and devotion as being empowering, context is important because for some categories of pilgrims and the church in general, they can be disempowering especially when suppression, inequality and even violence are legitimized.⁵⁵

6.1.5 Impact on Marian Devotion

In terms of devotional practices, the Rosary and the celebration of the Eucharist are foci common to all Marian shrines where Catholics worship. Thompson, drawing on the 1987-1988 Marian Year document, writes about the significance of Marian shrines and basilicas in that they are firstly places of worship of Christ and the celebration of the Eucharist. They reveal the fullness of the Paschal Mystery, communion with the universal Church, and the presence of Mary in word and symbol. It is here that the symbolism of pilgrimage at the shrine unfolds.⁵⁶ A common practice at Marian shrines are prayerful petitions of pilgrims. Common petitions are for

⁵³ Peter J. Margry, “Paradoxes of Marian Apparitional Contestation: Networks, Ideology, Gender, and the Lady of Nations,” in Hermkens et al., *Moved by Mary*, 199.

⁵⁴ Margry, “Paradoxes of Marian Apparitional Contestation,” 199.

⁵⁵ Hermkens et al., *Moved by Mary*, 3.

⁵⁶ Thompson, “Pilgrimage and Shrines,” 122.

physical healing, cure of disease, for the repose of the soul of a deceased family member, vocations, a marriage partner, the conception of a child, or for granting something of material importance like a job, a house, a car, protection of finances, resolution to a court case, and so forth. The reputation of the sanctuary also determines the bulk of petitions and the types of facilities available. For instance, the sick and wheelchair-bound are the VIPs of Lourdes, arriving in large numbers. Hospitaller volunteers of the Order of Malta arrive within minutes in the event someone takes seriously ill. Here one might expect that most pilgrims pray for the cure from illness either for themselves or for another person. It is common to see pilgrims blessed with the Monstrance or a sacred relic immediately after the Eucharist is celebrated.⁵⁷ Even though the sick come to Lourdes in large numbers, there are many among them who seek inner healing rather than physical cure. The cult that emerges at a apparition site can turn the phenomenon itself into a Marian movement as discussed next.

6.1.6 Marian Apparitions as Ecclesial Movements

Chapter 1 described the CCR as a “New Pentecost” in the Church. In her essay in *The Holy Spirit: Setting the World on Fire*, Margaret Guider argues that the global influence and significance of the CCR should not be underestimated.⁵⁸ She writes,

Attributing its international reception to the power of the Holy Spirit, this experience of a ‘New Pentecost’ within the Roman Catholic Church took on a vibrancy and power similar to experiences of the Holy Spirit recounted in Scriptures as well as those experiences manifested in rapidly growing Pentecostal churches and charismatic communities within mainline Protestant denominations.⁵⁹ As this phenomenon spread quickly throughout the world church, it not only fostered spiritual renewal through intense devotion to the Holy Spirit, but also affirmed the charismatic ethos of many other emerging ecclesial movements and new communities often referred to as the *Movimenti*.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ See Norbert D. Brockman, “Marian Pilgrimages and Shrines,” *Marian Studies* 51, no. 8 (2000): 103.

⁵⁸ Margaret E. Guider, “Spiritual Charisms in the World Church,” in *The Holy Spirit: Setting the World on Fire*, eds. Richard Lennan and Nancy Pineda-Madrid (New York: Paulist Press, 2017), 137.

⁵⁹ Todd M. Johnson, et al., “Status of Global Christianity, in the Context of 1900-2050,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39, no. 1 (January 2015): 29, in Guider, “Spiritual Charisms,” 137.

⁶⁰ Guider, “Spiritual Charisms,” 137.

The CCR today has an international presence with significant growth in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Oceania, and other regions of the world.⁶¹ It has popularized the messages of established as well as less well-known Marian apparitions and contributed to their international fame, Kibeho for example.⁶² Therefore, the CCR has created a way for its members to build a closer relation with Christ, and with Mary through the action of the Spirit.

Alongside the establishment of Marian confraternities, archconfraternities, and congregations, a number of organizations with a significant membership emerged during the 20th century to serve a purpose and give their charism a Marian character. In 1852, Bishop Philbert de Bruillard founded the *La Salette Missionaries* that currently has a presence in 25 countries.⁶³ The *Militia of the Immaculate Conception* founded by Maximilian Kolbe in 1917 today has a strength of three million adherents. The *Legion of Mary* founded by Frank Duff in 1921 has an active membership of 3 million and another 10 million auxiliary members. Marian apparitions and their messages also led to the foundation of new ecclesial movements. The *Blue Army of Mary* established in 1947 transformed into the *World Apostolate of Fátima* in 2006.⁶⁴ Mary's message to Fr. Gobbi in 1973 led to the *Marian Movement of Priests* established in 1975.⁶⁵ The *Fátima Family Apostolate* founded in 1986 promotes the message of Fátima and the sanctification of family life.

The last three are just few examples of organizations with origins in a particular apparition. The frequency of Marian apparitions has however, transformed the phenomenon itself into new religious movements that are global, cross-cultural, and multilayered, complex

⁶¹ See CCR International, <http://www.iccrs.org/en/homepage/> (accessed April 2, 2019).

⁶² Rittner et al., *Genocide in Rwanda*, 213.

⁶³ "La Salette—A Universal Mission," *Les Annales* (Jan-Feb 2011): 18-19. See <https://www.lasalette.org/about-la-salette/apparition/who-are-the-la-salettes/36-la-salette-a-universal-mission.html> (accessed May 27, 2019).

⁶⁴ Laurentin, *Question of Mary*, 10. Current membership taken from <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/l/index.php> (accessed May 13, 2019).

⁶⁵ Laurentin, *Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, 152-155.

with many social and political nodes, and informed by grassroots activism and institutional religious structures.⁶⁶ They are global in terms of reports of Mary's unrestricted outreach across continents. Jill Krebs and Joseph Laycock write that for the most part Marian apparitions uphold Church doctrine and ecclesial authority. They encourage attendance at Mass, sacramental Confession, and devotional practices like Eucharistic Adoration and the Rosary. Vailankanni, and more recently Medjugorje, demonstrate that even when they reinforce gospel values, the Church may not rule in their favor, and yet fall under institutional control. There are, however, a few anomalies. The Community of the Lady of All Nations (or Army of Mary) movement arising out of apparitions in Amsterdam in the 1940s and 1950s contradicts existing church teaching on Mary as Mediatrix and Co-Redemptrix.⁶⁷ The Holy Apostolic Catholic Palmarian Church that grew out of Marian apparitions in Andalusia in the 1960s claimed to be the true Catholic Church.⁶⁸ Therefore, not only should attention be paid to apparitions and the following they attract, but also to the fact that the Marian movements they give birth to "are ideal cases studies for exploring sociological and historical questions related to religious movements, charisma, prophecy, the supernatural, and the cultural milieu."⁶⁹

In many respects, Marian apparition movements uphold the tradition associated with other ecclesial movements in that they promote what Bradford Hinze calls personal and communal Christian processes of individuation.⁷⁰ These processes give their members a sense of

⁶⁶ Jill M. Krebs and Joseph Laycock, "Marian Apparitions as New Religious Movements," *Novo Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 21, no. 2 (2017): 5.

⁶⁷ The CDF issued a declaration on July 11, 2007 approved by Benedict XVI excommunicating the members of the Army of Mary.

⁶⁸ Krebs et al., "Marian Apparitions," 6.

⁶⁹ Krebs et al., "Marian Apparitions," 6.

⁷⁰ Individuation is a Jungian process that is both personal and collective where the unconscious is naturally integrated into the consciousness of the whole person. An example of the unconscious is a person's hidden talents or imagination. Jung defined individuation as the achievement of self-actualization through a process of integrating the conscious and the unconscious. See <http://journalpsyche.org/jung-and-his-individuation-process/> (accessed April 3, 2019).

belonging through participation in the collective individuation of the movement by immersing themselves in personal and communal prayer and having a mission orientation—service to the poor, hospitality, peacebuilding through ecumenical and interreligious relations, promotion of social justice through politics, legal work, and economic reform. These movements promote official church teachings on the sanctity of human life, and demonstrate the centrality of Jesus Christ and Mary in daily life experiences.⁷¹ As such, they trace the influence of religious beliefs and practices, political, economic, social, and cultural factors on the local and world church.

This section addressed the permanent function of Marian apparitions and its impact on devotion, piety, and their evolution as ecclesial movements. The next section addresses the prophetic function of apparitions in terms of their implications for Christian and interreligious unity that together with issues of equality and social justice are at the heart of the *imago Dei*.

6.2 PROPHETIC FUNCTION: Implications of Marian Apparitions for Unity of God's People

6.2.1 Church as Symbol and Sacrament of the Holy Spirit and as Communion

Among the ecclesial images emphasized by Vatican II is church as communion. Congar, Rahner, Ratzinger and other theologians popularized the communal or *koinonal* image that describes the nature of the church. The term *koinonia* expresses how communion enriches individuals and leads to ecclesial unity. Michael Fahey states that in 2 Corinthians 13:13, Paul compares the idea of communion with the image of the Body of Christ. For him, individuals first receive the Spirit, and then enter into fellowship with one another each possessing different gifts. Therefore, the New Testament usage of the term communion has vertical and horizontal dimensions.⁷² According to Richard Lennan, Karl Rahner understands the Church as a symbol

⁷¹ Bradford E. Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 196-197.

⁷² Michael A. Fahey, "The Church," in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, eds. Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge (New York: Routledge, 2008), 340-342.

and sacrament of the Holy Spirit.⁷³ As the Spirit works through church, culture, history, politics, other aspects of life, Rahner applied a sacramental identity to everything. He insisted that in the Church, the Spirit is working through every member from those in clerical authority to the lay faithful. Therefore, the Church as communion that expresses the action of the Spirit is neither authoritarian nor individualistic.⁷⁴

Lennan further explicates that though Rahner's ecclesiology was apolitical, it was not without political implications. For him it is the responsibility of the Church to edify the reign of God in contemporary history. It needed to be more than a pious entity, not neutral and inactive. The Church's dynamism demanded that she incarnate justice both within her confines and in the world at-large. Failure to be a voice that denounces injustice or promotes unity is alien to the Spirit.⁷⁵ The perennial disunity among Christians or marginalization of the religious 'other' who exists outside the Church are contrary to the *agape* of the Spirit and the Church's authenticity in the world. According to Lennan, Rahner believed that the Christian Church would be irrelevant to the contemporary world if her constituents remained obsessed with past disagreements.⁷⁶ Even though there have been significant strides toward Christian unity over the past fifty years, much work remains. The contemporary Church is experiencing a crisis of faith. Therefore, if Christian churches expended too much energy rehashing historically divisive topics that continue to keep them apart, they would be ill equipped to address the urgent issues of the present.⁷⁷ To address the concerns of the contemporary world, churches need to unite and speak

⁷³ Lennan, Richard, "Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, eds. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 131, 140.

⁷⁴ Lennan, "Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," 141.

⁷⁵ Lennan, "Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," 141.

⁷⁶ Lennan, "Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," 139.

⁷⁷ Lennan, "Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," 139 (see n. 22. "On the Theology of Ecumenical Discussion," Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* XI, 24-67; "The One Church and the Many Churches," Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* XVII, 183-196).

with one voice, a voice that can come from highlighting what they already share (life in the Spirit, life in the world, and common challenges). This new voice can help initiate and sustain dialogue through encounter that addresses contentious issues.⁷⁸

6.2.2 The Role of Marian Apparitions in the Call to Dialogue and Communion

The Marian apparitions studied are only three of the hundreds of such manifestations of the Spirit's action in Mary. For centuries, *Arrokiya Matha* has drawn Hindus and Christians together at her Vailankanni basilica on the Coromandel, and yet today Hindu nationalism in India has diminished some of the fruitfulness of the Spirit's work. During and after the appearances of *Umm al-Noor* at Zeitoun, Egypt witnessed Muslim-Christian unity not seen before, and yet the spiraling violence against Copts is counter to the Spirit's unifying action. At Kibeho, *Nyina wa Jambo* reiterated her appeals for prayer, recitation of the Rosary, repentance, reconciliation, an end to hatred and violence, and a return to God, but the ongoing strife between Hutu and Tutsi led to civil war in Rwanda. In these and other instances of Marian apparitions, the overall message is the same—the recovery of the spiritual elements of faith, and the call to unity and peace among people that can be achieved through dialogue.

Prior to Vatican II, the official teaching was that the Catholic Church is “the one true Church of Christ” and that all other churches existed outside the Body of Christ, as a result of which they were beyond the reach of salvation.⁷⁹ Richard McBrien writes that *Unitatis redintegratio* gradually changed that mentality. The Catholic Church now recognizes the possibility of salvation for all Christians, the followers of other religions, as well as agnostics and

⁷⁸ Lennan, “Ecclesiology and Ecumenism,” 139.

⁷⁹ Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 175.

atheists.”⁸⁰ At the outset, the decree affirms: “The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.” Christian communities, professing discipleship of Jesus Christ but differing in mindset, claimed to be inheritors of the truth and went their separate ways creating division in the Body of Christ. This openly contradicts the will of Christ and contravenes the cause of evangelization.⁸¹ The decree acknowledges the challenges faced in achieving Christian unity owing to the “considerable divergences from the doctrine of the Catholic Church concerning Christ Himself, the Word of God made flesh, the work of redemption and consequently, concerning the mystery and ministry of the Church, and the role of Mary in the plan of salvation.”⁸² That there may be unity among all Christians and with followers of other religious traditions is the eschatological function of the reign of God toward which the Church must advance.

In *Ecclesiam Suam*, Paul VI affirms, “The church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives. It has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make.”⁸³ Though ecclesial teaching is always attentive to vertical communion (dialogue between God and humanity), the pope summons the church to immerse herself in horizontal communion (among human beings). Marian apparitions in some way are an inducement to both dimensions of dialogue and communion where the unifying principle of the Holy Spirit is manifest. Frederick

⁸⁰ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 72-101, and *The Church*, Wolfhart Pannenberg, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 44-68, in McBrien, *The Church*, 175.

⁸¹ UR §1.

⁸² UR §20.

⁸³ Paul VI, Encyclical on the Church *Ecclesiam suam* (6 August 1964), §65, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html.

Jelly writes that, “Mary has been given an essential role in the ecumenical and interreligious quest to promote the rights of every human being through divine means.”⁸⁴

In an article on Mary and Christian unity, John Radano writes that in preparation for the year 2000, then President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Francis Arinze, stressed the role of Mary in overcoming divisions and religious indifference. Arinze writes:

Mary can and does have a key role today in helping humanity to overcome divisions and religious indifference. She is the prominent daughter of Zion. She is the mother of Christians. She is honored by Muslims as a Virgin always holy and obedient to God. Even among religions that do not know her expressly, like Hinduism, Buddhism and some Traditional Religions, there is an unconscious seeking of her and of her motherly and mediatory role with the Divine Omnipotence and Transcendence. ... Christians should not forget that the Virgin Mary is honored by some believers and that she will help make inter-religious contacts fruitful.”⁸⁵

This section picks up where Chapter 2 left off concerning ecumenism and interreligious unity briefly introduced under the subheading “Other Aspects of Interpretation” of Marian apparitions. Chapters 3 and 4 also initiate the discussion of these aspects of the horizontal dimension of communion for which dialogue and encounter are critical.

6.2.2.1 The Spirit through Mary Guides the Church as an Ecumenical Community

Since Vatican II, ecumenical dialogue between Roman Catholics and other Christians has resulted in progress with the Orthodox and Anglican Churches while Catholics and Protestants are reassessing their positions and have made strides in healing divisions.

Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue and Journey toward Full Communion

The process of rapprochement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church began during Vatican II. On January 5, 1964, a historic meeting took place between Paul

⁸⁴ Frederick M. Jelly, “Mariology and Ecumenism—Reflections upon 1965-1990,” *Marian Library Studies* 17, no. 38 (2014): 555.

⁸⁵ Francis Arinze, “The Holy Year: A Call to Overcome Divisions and Indifference,” in “Preparing for the Year 2000: Pope John Paul II on How to Prepare for the Next Thousand Years—The Third Millennium,” 246. Quoted in “Toward the Great Jubilee 2000: Mary and the Search for Christian Unity,” John Radano, *Marian Studies* 48, no. 7 (1997): 20-21.

VI and Athenogoras I in Jerusalem. On December 7, 1965, the two leaders signed a Common Declaration annulling the mutual excommunications of 1054.⁸⁶ On July 25, 1967, Paul VI visited Athenogoras in Constantinople and presented him with the Apostolic Brief *Anno Inuente*, acknowledging the sister-church relationship between their Sees.⁸⁷ In October the same year, Athenogoras reciprocated his counterpart's gesture by traveling for a three-day visit to Rome.

In September 1971, the First Pro Oriente Consultation between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches⁸⁸ took place at Dair Anba Bishoi monastery to clarify and end the centuries-old polemic that had mistakenly accused the Copts of denying Jesus' human nature.⁸⁹ The successor to Kyrillos VI, Shenouda III, accompanied by eight Egyptian and two Ethiopian metropolitans, met Paul VI at the Vatican May 4-10, 1973. The meeting resulted in both popes signing a Common Declaration⁹⁰ on the issue of "mia physis" christology and agreed to establish joint commissions for continued dialogue on unity.

Continuing the legacy of Paul VI and Kyrillos VI, John Paul II met with Shenouda III in Cairo in February 2000 to continue their efforts at reestablishing full communion. In January 2012, Benedict XVI welcomed leaders from several Orthodox Churches to continue talks aimed at progressing toward full communion.⁹¹ In May 2013, addressing Tawadros II, Francis said:

⁸⁶ E. J. Stormon, ed., *Towards the Healing of Schism: The Sees of Rome and Constantinople: Public Statements and Correspondence between The Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarch, 1958-1984*, trans. E. J. Stormon; Ecumenical Documents III (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 126-128, in Radano, "Mary and the Search for Christian Unity," 31.

⁸⁷ Cf. Frans Bouwen, "Churches, Sister," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Lossky, et al. (Grand Rapids: Williams B. Eerdmans, 1991), in Radano, "Mary and the Search for Christian Unity," 29. The mutual recognition as "Sister Churches" by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches during and after Vatican II signifies a sharing in common apostolic origins and succession, communion in faith and hope, a common sacramental structure, and the same hierarchical priesthood.

⁸⁸ Otto F. A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 73.

⁸⁹ Meinardus, "Coptic Orthodox Inculturation," 73.

⁹⁰ Paul VI and Shenouda III, "Common Declaration of His Holiness Paul VI and His Holiness Patriarch Amba Shenouda III" (10 May 1973) at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1973/may/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19730510_dichiarazione-comune.html.

⁹¹ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church Documents (1973-1988)," *Information Service* N.76 1991 (1): 1-32. This document is a repository of the ecumenical efforts toward unity between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Cor 12:26). This is the law of Christian life, and in this sense we can say that there is also an ecumenism of suffering: just as the blood of the martyrs was a seed of strength and fertility for the Church, so too the sharing of the daily sufferings can become an effective instrument of unity. And this also applies in a broader context of society and relations between Christians and non-Christians: from shared suffering can blossom forth forgiveness, reconciliation and peace, with God's help.⁹²

Since Vatican II, all popes and patriarchs have visited each other and signed common declarations, clarifying divergences that have lasted for more than nine centuries and renewing their commitment to unity between their respective apostolic sees.⁹³ The subject of Mary, according to John Radano, received more attention during the exchange between John Paul II and Dimitrios I despite difficulties arising from "certain unilateral actions of a dogmatic nature concerned with her venerable person" on the part of the Catholic Church.⁹⁴

The path to communion among Christian churches is not without its challenges. In a recent setback for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Russian Orthodox Church adopted a Declaration on October 15, 2018 breaking communion with the Eastern Orthodox Church for several reasons: admitting schismatics into communion, anathematizing a person in another local church, encroachment on other canonical regions, and attempting to abandon historical decisions and commitments.⁹⁵

Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogues

Among the other early dialogues post-Vatican II is the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) established by the Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey and Paul VI. The Anglicans recognize Mary's role as "inseparably linked to the doctrines

⁹² Francis, "Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of The See of St. Mark, Head of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt" (10 May 2013) at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco_20130510_tawadros.html.

⁹³ Radano, "Mary and the Search for Christian Unity," 21.

⁹⁴ "The Patriarch's Homily," *IS* 66 (1988): 20, in Radano, "Mary and the Search for Christian Unity," 36.

⁹⁵ Vatican News, "Russian Orthodox Church Breaks 'Eucharistic communion' with Patriarchate of Constantinople" (16 October 2018) at The Holy See, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2018-10/russian-orthodox-break-communion-with-ecumenical-patriarch.html> (accessed March 29, 2019).

of Christ and of the Church,” and her unique vocation as Mother of God Incarnate (1981 Windsor Statement). They have reservations about the dogmatic definitions of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption concerning papal authority and the absence of scriptural warranty (1968 Malta, 1976 Venice, and 1981 Windsor statements).⁹⁶ A second series of conversations by ARCIC focused on the Marian dogmas in the 2005 document “Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ” submitted to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity. Its goal is to study the Marian dogmas within Pauline texts on divine foreknowledge, predestination, and glorification. Other areas for exploration are the blessings accorded to Mary as relative to Christ, Mary in the Communion of Saints, and an eschatological understanding of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.⁹⁷

Obstacles to Dialogue with Mainline Protestant Churches⁹⁸

The place of honor that Mary held in the devotion and theology of the founders of the Reformation reasserts that Protestants do not object to the person of Mary. Their complaint is against the misplaced devotion to the Blessed Virgin and Marian doctrine in Catholic theology. What are some of the key obstacles to bridging the divide between Catholics and Protestants?

Perception that Mary is a Substitute for the Holy Spirit in Catholic Theology

As discussed in Chapter 1, Protestants contend that whenever and wherever they expect the Holy Spirit in Catholic theology, they find Mary.⁹⁹ To address this objection, Suenens claims that any attempt to show the dynamic unity between the Holy Spirit and Mary in the Incarnation would be a step forward in the ecumenical discourse.¹⁰⁰ He affirms that only the

⁹⁶ Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2009), 435-436.

⁹⁷ Graef, *Mary*, 444-446.

⁹⁸ As defined in the introduction, Mainline Protestant Churches include United Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, United Church of Christ, and Christian Church.

⁹⁹ Gibson, “Mary and the Protestant Mind,” in Suenens, “Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit,” 6.

¹⁰⁰ Suenens, “Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit,” 6.

Holy Spirit can reveal Mary because she is a part of the mystery of the Father, Jesus and the Church. Overshadowed by the Spirit, it is Mary's "yes" to the mystery of the Incarnation that made her the mother of the One Redeemer. The Holy Spirit progressively illumines Mary's life in this unfolding mystery—the voice that Joseph hears urging him to take Mary as his wife, Simeon's prophecy at the Presentation, the wedding at Cana, near the cross at Calvary, and the coming of the Paraclete at Pentecost.¹⁰¹ In all these biblical scenes, Mary serves as an agent of the Holy Spirit. After her Assumption, she continues to serve as an instrument of the Spirit through numerous cosmic interventions in human history.

Marian Dogmatic Definitions of the Roman Catholic Church

Is it possible to arrive at an ecumenical understanding of the Marian dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church that unites Catholics and Protestants? If Catholics can show that Marian dogmas are rooted in Scripture or they are the result of the dynamic unity between the Spirit and Mary (as Suenens suggests), it would be a step forward. Donald Dawe explicates the dogma of the Assumption in light of the Holy Spirit. For Protestants, the *sola Christus* principle rooted in scripture (1 Tim 2, 5) governs all ecumenical discourse because Christ alone is the source of salvation premised on *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia*.¹⁰² Though scripture does not contain explicit witness to the Assumption, Dawe argues that New Testament eschatology lays the foundation for its dogmatic development in ecclesial life.¹⁰³ Mary's human example serves as

¹⁰¹ Suenens, "Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit," 9-11.

¹⁰² Donald G. Dawe, "The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ecumenical Perspective," in *Mary and Ecumenism: Papers of the 1981 International Congress of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, ed. James Walsh, *The Way Supplement* 45 (June 1982): 43-44.

¹⁰³ Dawe, "Assumption," 46-47. Dawe explains *prolepsis* as an anticipation of an ending introduced into a story before reaching the conclusion. He identifies three types of eschatological assertions in the New Testament. The kingdom is a present reality of the Paschal Mystery (realized eschatology). The kingdom is coming in the future and is not fully present in human history (futuristic eschatology). The kingdom is already established with the Paschal Mystery, but the faithful can only fragmentarily share in its present reality while awaiting its full consummation in the "last times." The Holy Spirit imparts to them the first fruits (Rom 8, 23) or the guarantee (2 Cor 1, 22; 5, 5; Eph 1, 14) of full salvation (46).

a beacon of hope, revealing the scope and nature of salvation that awaits the people of God at the eschaton.¹⁰⁴ The Assumption confesses that Mary has entered fully into the salvific reign of God. He further explains that the faithful only know of the promise of salvation as ‘gifts’ or ‘guarantees’ of the Spirit in a fragmentary way. The Assumption transforms all aspects of Mary’s humanity into the eternal new life making her a sign of hope of what awaits humanity, and an expression of the *proleptic* nature of the kingdom. Dawe clarifies that Mary is not the source her redemption, but an embodiment her Son’s work. Owing to her special place in the Communion of Saints, and her role in the Incarnation, she was redeemed body and soul, and entered into the beatific vision that the Pilgrim Church only has glimpses of. Therefore, Dawe concludes, the Assumption “points to the reality of full salvation that will be that of the people of God eschatologically.”¹⁰⁵ Dawe has similarly explicated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.¹⁰⁶

Catholic Disposition toward the Protestant Position

A negative disposition is the exclusive language Catholics use in reference to Protestants. Referring to those who are not Catholic as “non-Catholic” (language commonly used in South Asian countries like India) folds all Protestant denominations into the category of non-Christian religions as though they have nothing to do with Christianity. It is also alienating that the Catholic Church refers to Protestant churches as “ecclesial communities” as though they are not real churches or something less. Therefore, an atmosphere in which ecumenical encounter and dialogue can flourish is one that begins with the right disposition toward the Christian ‘other.’

¹⁰⁴ Dawe, “Assumption,” 45-46.

¹⁰⁵ Dawe, “Assumption,” 48-49. Dawe draws a distinction between the Assumption of Mary and the Resurrection of Jesus with respect to their historicity. The Assumption does not relate to a particular event in history nor was there a cult or eyewitnesses at Mary’s tomb. *MD* simply states that at the end of her earthly life, Mary was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. On the other hand, the Resurrection of Jesus did occur in time and space and scripture affirms the presence of eyewitnesses to the empty tomb (1 Cor 15, 3-8).

¹⁰⁶ See Donald Dawe, “The Immaculate Conception in Ecumenical Perspective,” in *Mary in Christian Tradition: Papers of the 1984 International Congress of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, eds. David Lonsdale and Philip Sheldrake, *The Way Supplement* 51 (Autumn 1984): 32-43.

Marian Devotion Obscures Primacy of God in Jesus Christ

In dedicating so much attention to Mary, Protestants fear that Marian devotion has caused the truth of Christ's Godhead and the vocation of Christian witness to be underappreciated. Theologians emphasize that the role of Catholic witness is the privilege and role of the baptized, and therefore, the modern Catholic will continue to bear witness to Christ and promote a mutual understanding between Christians in the hope that Protestants realize that Catholic devotion to Mary in no way detracts from venerating Christ.^{107 108}

To underscore Mary's place in the Church, Congar emphasizes the preposition "in" in the title of Chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium* that Mary is one of the redeemed. Catholic teaching reiterates that there is only One Redeemer in Jesus Christ. To avoid confusion and misinterpretation of Mary's role in redemption, Vatican II avoided using the title 'Co-redemptrix,' even though it has been part of Marian tradition for centuries.¹⁰⁹ The proceedings about Mary at Vatican II made clear that the only place where ecumenical dialogue about Mary can begin is Scripture. Even though the New Testament is largely silent about Mary, interpreting her place in the Church and the economy of salvation in pneumatological terms can move the discourse forward. Over the decades Mary has become a subject of ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian communions like the Anglicans and, as reviewed earlier, the Orthodox, though doctrinal and dogmatic divergences remain.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Michael Hurley, "Ecumenism and Mariology," *The Furrow* 14, no. 4 (April 1963): 222-223.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Johnson has written that as a result of the Reformation, Catholics developed a fixation on Mary. She is right because Catholic pneumatology at the time was underdeveloped and the closest association to the femininity of the Spirit was Mary.

¹⁰⁹ Jelly, "Mariology and Ecumenism," 549-550.

¹¹⁰ Jelly, "Mariology and Ecumenism," 550-554.

Mary's Mediation and Intercession

Clarifying Mary's place in Catholic theology and addressing her mediatory and intercessory roles are the essentials of ecumenical dialogue with Protestants because, for them, these aspects run counter to the *sola Christus* mediatorship. In this dialogue, Jelly insists that it is necessary to show that Mary's dependent and subordinate mediation only enhances the *sola Christus* principle. The mediating roles of Christ and Mary are not the same. Even the title of *Mediatrice of all graces* assigned to Mary does not place her on the same footing as her Son, nor make her a bridge between humanity and Christ.¹¹¹

Identifying these obstacles to dialogue does not discount the successes of the many ongoing consultations among Christian denominations, notably the Lutheran-Roman Catholic International, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, and the Dombes Group that have produced consensus statements to creatively explore new language of the Christian tradition handed down by the apostles.¹¹²

John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis have carried forward the commitment to ecumenism initiated by Vatican II's *Unitatis redintegratio*, and Paul VI. The council grounds the Church's task in promoting ecumenism in Trinitarian unity. During his Passion, Jesus prayed, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21), words that embrace all people and express the depth of his *agape*. It teaches that if Christians are to call themselves followers of Christ, they must desire unity; if they desire unity, they must desire the Church; if they desire the Church, they must desire the communion of grace according to the unique and universal plan of God's salvation. This is what Christ's prayer "that they may all be one" (*ut unum sint*) means. This unity

¹¹¹ Jelly, "Mariology and Ecumenism," 564-565.

¹¹² Michael A. Fahey, "Some Trends in American Catholic Systematic Theology," in *Catholic Theology Facing the Future: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Dermot A. Lane (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2003), 67, in Graef, *Mary*, 446.

bestowed by the Holy Spirit binds them into a fellowship strengthened by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments, and hierarchical communion. In the Spirit, Christians are in communion with Jesus, and through him, they share his communion with the Father.¹¹³

The Role of Conversion and Prayer

In the final analysis, John Paul II teaches, there can be no ecumenism without a conversion of heart and without prayer. Vatican II emphasized an interior conversion on the part of all Christians in their journey towards unity. Interior conversion, renewal of mind, and prayer are essential to the task of evangelization and to living the Christian vocation. This requires both personal and communal conversion through a heightened sense of repentance, renewal, and reform. The call to repentance means becoming sensitive to certain exclusions that an individual or a community has held on to that have seriously harmed fraternal charity, an awareness of certain refusals to forgive the 'other,' of pride, of unhealthy presumption, and on unevangelical insistence on condemning the "other side."¹¹⁴

UUS also recognizes the power of prayer as the basis and support of ecumenical dialogue. Dialogue is an indispensable step toward unity, ecumenical or interreligious, in every human community, but also implies a global existential dimension, as expressed by Paul VI in *Ecclesiam suam*.¹¹⁵ Authentic dialogue presupposes a desire for reconciliation and unity on the part of each side that leads to truer knowledge that is more than an appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both churches. It leads to greater cooperation and an examination of conscience in working on projects for the common good of both churches, to reflect on their faithfulness to

¹¹³ John Paul II, Encyclical on Commitment to Ecumenism *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), §9, at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html.

¹¹⁴ *UUS* §15.

¹¹⁵ *UUS* §28.

Christ's will for his One Church, and where necessary, to undertake the tasks of renewal and reform for sustaining unity.¹¹⁶

6.2.2.2 Interreligious Encounter as the Work of the Spirit through Mary

One of the lessons of the three apparitions studied is that Mary is not appearing to persons and places conditioned on their being Catholic. Interfaith contexts where she has appeared have witnessed the dynamic work of the Spirit in bringing about interreligious harmony. Those contexts, unfortunately, have also witnessed human and inhuman acts that are contrary to the unifying work of the Spirit.

Vailankanni is witness to Hindus and Christians (as well as a minority of Muslims) praying together, but what happens at Vailankanni stays in Vailankanni. In general, the evangelization that occurs at Vailankanni is paradoxical. On one hand, when Hindus return home from their pilgrimage they do not go to local parishes to pray, attend Mass or practice devotions to Mary. On the other hand, they play a key role in spreading the word about Arrokiya Matha and that in turn draws many other Hindus to the shrine. In effect, it is not just Christians, but Hindus too, who are evangelizing the healing message of Vailankanni. Though there are converts among Hindus, they are fewer in number in recent decades, in part due to the nationalist brand of Hinduism (*Hindutva*) that threatens Hindu-Christian-Muslim unity in India. The whole issue of proselytization to another faith, especially Christianity and Islam owing to their foreign origins, has threatened the vocation of missions and the lives of missionaries.

During and after the apparitions, Zeitoun stood witness to Christian-Muslim unity unlike any time before. However, the wavering support of successive governments that eventually turned Egypt into an Islamic state was a blow to this post-apparition spirit of unity.

¹¹⁶ *UUS* §29, §32, §33.

The apparitions at Kibeho were welcomed as the grace of the Spirit in Mary. The apparitions continue to bear much fruit in the spiritual lives of Rwandans and the local church. Decades of colonial rule and post-independence state politics in which the church played a complicit role, left the question of Hutu-Tutsi identity unsettled. The country's history of massacres as well as the emotional wounds of the genocide still leave Tutsi suspicious of the Hutu despite strides toward local and national reconciliation. Reconciliation in Rwanda is not only between Hutu and Tutsi, but also between the Church, the Tutsi, the affected Hutu, and the Twa. Though many Tutsi and Hutu identify themselves as Christian today, huge segments of the population are adherents of African traditional religion, and in that respect, there is a need for rapprochement between the followers of Christianity and those of indigenous faith.

These apparitions awaken the Church to an important contemporary reality facing the church and nations. The increase in migration of peoples in large numbers across the globe in recent decades has brought the religious and cultural identities of those people to their new domiciles. As a result, societies, including those in the West, have become religiously plural. Every day is an encounter between Christians and followers of other religions. Recognizing the signs of the times, John Paul II made the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue a priority for Catholic leaders and thinkers.¹¹⁷ Developments in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit since Vatican II have influenced Christian reflection on the Church's engagement with religious pluralism, and the challenges of interreligious dialogue in ecclesial life.

The Church and Other Religions in the Conciliar Documents of Vatican II

Though one of the significant priorities of Vatican II was Christian unity, the council also opened its doors to the world of other religions. One of its key declarations was *Nostra aetate*

¹¹⁷ Gerald O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis' Contributions to Interreligious Dialogue," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 388.

on the Church's relation to non-Christian religions. In this document, the council affirms that the Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions and exhorts Christians to exercise prudence and love in carrying out dialogue and collaboration with their followers. In doing so, however, Christians must bear witness to faith and life in Christ, and "recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found [in these religious traditions]" (NA §2).

The council teaches that other religions also propose "ways" that include teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites that promote unity and love among peoples and nations, and draws them together in fellowship by what they share in common (NA §1-2). For instance, what Muslims and Christians share in common provides the opportunity for mutual understanding, for putting the hostilities of the past behind, and for working together to promote social justice, moral welfare, peace, and freedom (NA §3). Recognizing the spiritual patrimony that Jews and Christians share in the Old Testament, the Church fosters mutual understanding and respect. The Church is sensitive to the expression it gives herself as the 'new people of God' in that it should not be presented as replacing Jews as God's chosen people, but as Christ through his cross, reconciling Jews and Gentiles, making both one in himself (Eph 2:14-16) (NA §4).

Even though *Nostra aetate* undoubtedly made a significant contribution to what later emerged as a Christian theology of religions, according to Gerald O'Collins, other key conciliar documents like *Sacrosanctum concilium* (1963), *Lumen gentium* (1964), *Ad gentes* (1965), and *Gaudium et spes* (1965) have also had an impact¹¹⁸ and are briefly included here.

Sacrosanctum concilium, the council's constitution on Sacred Liturgy, states that through the Eucharist, the faithful manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the authenticity of the

¹¹⁸ Gerald O'Collins, "The Second Vatican Council on Other Living Faiths," *Pacifica* 26, no. 2 (June 2013): 155.

Church as a sign that lifts up *all* peoples of the world gathering them into one (SC §2).¹¹⁹ It encourages Catholics to worship in solidarity with the entire world and become actively concerned about the salvation of all people.¹²⁰ *Lumen gentium*, the council's dogmatic constitution on the Church, states that the Church's faith holds that through Christ's redeeming work, "all human beings are called to the new People of God" (LG §13). This has been interpreted that in different ways: people "belong" (by virtue of their Christian baptism) to catholic unity or are "ordered" (*ordinantur*) to it under the universal headship of Christ whether they know it or not.¹²¹ All human beings without exception, whether Christian or non-Christian, are called by God's grace to salvation (LG §16).¹²² *Ad gentes*, the council's decree on the Church's missionary activity draws attention to the role of the Spirit in uniting all people to Christ through the 'seeds of the Word' (riches sown by God in other religious and national traditions) and the preaching of the Gospel.¹²³ The decree urges those religious who work in cultures that include Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims to pay close attention to their traditions of contemplation and asceticism, and to consider what to appropriate in Christian religious life (AG §18).¹²⁴ It emphasizes fraternal dialogue that enables collaboration between Christians and non-Christians through their respective domestic and internal organizations in areas of social and economic affairs like education, healthcare, better living conditions, and peace (AG §41).¹²⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, the council's pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world, addresses the dignity of

¹¹⁹ O'Collins, "Second Vatican Council," 156.

¹²⁰ O'Collins, "Second Vatican Council," 156-157.

¹²¹ Rahner's notion of "anonymous" Christians.

¹²² Gerald O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 30-31, in O'Collins, "Second Vatican Council," 158. Article 16 distinguishes between Jews, Muslims, other believers in God and those who, through no fault of their own, have not yet come to an explicit knowledge of God.

¹²³ O'Collins, "Second Vatican Council," 166.

¹²⁴ O'Collins, "Second Vatican Council," 166-167.

¹²⁵ O'Collins, "Second Vatican Council," 167.

universal rights and duties of all people who are created in the *imago Dei* (GS, Chapter I). O'Collins writes that GS endorses dialogue and collaboration with other religions so that through the Spirit all human beings can receive the gift of faith, and become united with Christ.¹²⁶ Dialogue and collaboration fosters an attitude of reverence for the religious other and excludes no one, though an appropriate measure of prudence is always necessary (GS §93). Not on O'Collins list is *Dignitatis humanae*, the council's declaration on religious freedom that teaching, instruction, communication, and dialogue in a manner appropriate to the dignity and social nature of the human person help arrive at the truth (DH §3). The declaration, however insists that, "one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church" (DH §1).

The Church and Other Religions in Postconciliar Documents

Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) begins with a statement of the Catholic Church's respect for other faiths, but emphasizes there is a continuing need for proclamation of the Gospel to establish a true relationship with God.¹²⁷ Loe-Joo Tan points out that this exhortation makes no mention of dialogue as a way of engaging with other religions. John Paul II's *Redemptoris missio* (1990) on the other hand, is explicit about other religions in the economy of salvation. In *DeV*, he acknowledged the presence of the Spirit in the adherents of other religions, but in *RM* he clearly asserts the Spirit's work among religions in that they are "participated mediations" in the sole mediation of Christ.¹²⁸

"Dialogue and Proclamation" (1991) issued by the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue affirms that adherents of other faiths may be saved *in* their religious traditions by the

¹²⁶ O'Collins, *Second Vatican Council*, chapter 6.

¹²⁷ Loe-Joo Tan, "Things Are Not What They Seem": *Dominus Iesus*, Ecumenism, and Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 525-526.

¹²⁸ Tan, "Things Are Not What They Seem," 527. Autonomously means nothing inherent to the religion is salvific.

work of the Holy Spirit; however, nothing within the religions brings about salvation autonomously.¹²⁹ In what appeared to be a move to stem the development of a Catholic theology of religious pluralism, the CDF issued the proclamation *Dominus Iesus*.¹³⁰ The proclamation asserts that Christ is the sole mediator of salvation, and relates the unicity and salvific universality of his mediation with the unicity and unity of the Catholic Church (*DI* §20). The proclamation reiterates the indispensability of the Church and rejects other religions as offering alternate paths to salvation.¹³¹ It states:

Certainly, the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God, and which are part of what “the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures, and religions.” Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God. One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments.⁸⁸ Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. 1 Cor 10:20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation.¹³²

Therefore, *Dominus Iesus* views other religions as deficient in nature, and that while their adherents may have received divine grace one cannot claim salvation through them.¹³³

In summary, though these conciliar and postconciliar documents acknowledge the place of other religions in ecclesial life and suggest that God has endowed other religious faiths and national cultures with the riches of divine grace, without the acceptance of the Gospel, they regard these traditions as deficient in some way or other. In a departure from the position in

¹²⁹ Tan, “Things Are Not What They Seem,” 529.

¹³⁰ CDF, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000) at The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

¹³¹ Tan, “Things Are Not What They Seem,” 530.

¹³² *DI* §20 in Tan, “Things Are Not What They Seem,” 532.

¹³³ Tan, “Things Are Not What They Seem,” 530, 532.

these documents, what follows is Jacques Dupuis' Christian theology of religious pluralism in conversation with other voices on the salvific status of other religious traditions.

Jacques Dupuis' Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism in Conversation with Other Voices

This subsection engages two important works of Jacques Dupuis—*Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* and *Toward a Christian Theology of Pluralism*¹³⁴ to explicate his theology of “inclusive pluralism” rooted in the conviction that other religions have positive value in the economy of salvation and therefore their adherents may be saved through their traditions.

Affirming Jesus Christ as the universal Savior, the central question of the Church's approach to dialogue with other religions has been the possibility of salvation in Christ for their members. At the beginning of *Christianity and the Religions*, Dupuis acknowledges that a rigid understanding of St. Cyprian's axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church there is no salvation) found its way into papal and council documents until the fifteenth century.¹³⁵ This narrow interpretation of the Church's soteriological role raises important questions for Dupuis:

Today we ask how such negative opinions could prosper and remain received doctrine for so long. We wonder what idea was being entertained of the God of revelation, the God who created all humans, the one who, according to the revealed message of the Old and New Testament, “is not partial” (Deut 10:17), the one with whom “there is no partiality” (Rom 2:11), the one who “shows no preference for persons” (Act 10:34)—was not that God perhaps reduced to a narrow and partial god in the work of those churchmen? How could [God] have allowed the majority of the human beings in the world, all created by [God] with the same destiny of union with [God], to have been lost forever? Furthermore, how could [God] have allowed [God's] universal plan of salvation to thereby be deprived of realization in the history of [humankind]?¹³⁶

¹³⁴ On January 24, 2001 the CDF issued the Notification:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html to Dupuis concerning *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, citing that the book contains “ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points, which could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions.”

¹³⁵ Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 2-3. Cyprian did not use this axiom against non-Christians, but for Christians who wanted to leave the Church.

¹³⁶ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 3.

In the decades leading up to Vatican II, a more positive disposition with respect to the salvation for the religious ‘other’ began to emerge among Catholic theologians. The question was no longer about salvation of individual persons of the other religion, but of the recognition of positive values in the religious traditions themselves. For some theologians, the positive elements refer to the divine gifts inherent in human nature, whereas for others they are seeds of “truth and grace” bestowed as God’s personal gifts to human beings and discovered in their religious traditions. In the first perspective, Dupuis claims that human beings attain “natural” knowledge of God without establishing real contact with God. Their salvation is irrespective of their belonging to a religious tradition. In the second, people witness a manifestation of God, and their religious traditions continue the memory of that authentic experience.

The Christian interpretation of the second perspective is that religious traditions unknowingly bring about salvation of their adherents through Christ¹³⁷ (the notion of “receptive pluralism” adopted by FABC with respect to interreligious dialogue). Among the voices that subscribe to this perspective is Peter Phan. Ambrose Ih-Ren Mong writes that for Phan receptive pluralism “holds in fruitful tension two basic truths of Christian faith, namely, the universal salvific will of God and the necessary mediation of Jesus Christ in the salvation of every individual.”¹³⁸ Dialogue with other religions is complex particularly in contexts like Asia where extreme conditions of poverty and the presence of many world religions are two predominant realities. Therefore, dialogue in these contexts must emphasize both religiosity and suffering with immediacy and urgency (an Aloysius Pieris argument).¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 4.

¹³⁸ Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 30, in *Dialogue Derailed: Joseph Ratzinger’s War against Pluralist Theology*, Ambrose Ih-Ren Mong (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 242. Phan ran into difficulties with the Vatican when the CDF equated religious pluralism with relativism. He clarified that the FABC regards relativism to be in opposition to pluralism.

¹³⁹ Mong, *Dialogue Derailed*, 244.

A third perspective, one that Dupuis puts forth in *Toward a Christian Theology of Pluralism* is not about whether salvation is through Christ, but about the positive value that these religious traditions themselves have in God's singular plan of salvation.¹⁴⁰ On this point, the International Theological Commission issued the document "Christianity and the World Religions" (1997). It proposes that other religions have salvific significance premised on the claim that the Holy Spirit is present in religions. It affirms: "It would be difficult to think that what the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of [human beings] taken as individuals would have salvific value and think that what the Holy Spirit works in the religions and cultures would not have such value."¹⁴¹

Asian-American Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong shares a perspective similar to that expressed in the ITC document. He explicates that a pneumatological theology of religions proceeds in part from Acts 2:17 and "begins with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the universal presence and activity of God, and attempts to understand the world of religions within that universal framework."¹⁴² The Spirit grants understanding of, participation in, and engagement with other languages, cultures, and religious traditions. Therefore, Yong argues that the Spirit who gave those present in the cenacle the capacity to speak in foreign languages can by extension, enable participation in a foreign culture and a foreign religion.¹⁴³

According to O'Collins, in trying to understand the place of world religions from a Christian perspective, the central question for Dupuis then is "How can we profess and proclaim faith in Jesus Christ as the one redeemer of all humankind, and at the same time recognize the

¹⁴⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 4-5.

¹⁴¹ International Theological Commission, "Christianity and the World Religions," no. 84, *Origins* 27 (August 1997): 161, in Tan, "Things are Not What They Seem," 524 n. 6.

¹⁴² Amos Yong, "A P(new)matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World," *Missiology: An International Review* 33, no. 2 (April 2005): 176-177. An exegetical reading of "all flesh" in Acts 2:17 has universal application and includes other religions. In Luke's narrative, it includes Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

¹⁴³ Yong, "P(new)matological Paradigm," 180.

Spirit at work in the world's religions and cultures?" Christian faith teaches that Jesus is the one and universal redeemer, but in practice, there appear to be more than one visible path to salvation.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Dupuis suggests that all parties, especially the Church, should distance themselves from an exclusivist attitude, and embrace "inclusive pluralism," in proportion to the particular situation that fosters positive mutual relations between peoples, cultures, and religions of the world.¹⁴⁵ The notion of "inclusive pluralism" for Dupuis is biblical, recalling how God established saving covenants with "other" peoples, recognizing them as "peoples of God." The "many and various ways" (Hebrews 1:1) that foster an understanding of divine revelation must include other religious traditions as "participated mediations" in the "one mediation" of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁶ For this reason, interreligious dialogue as an approach to fostering unity must be a mutually enriching encounter that realizes "inclusive pluralism" in the concrete. Yong claims that through interreligious dialogue, Christians engage their own tradition and that of the religious 'others.' This involves interpersonal engagement where each party takes the other seriously on the other's own terms. Each makes an honest effort to understand doctrines from the other's perspective while also challenging the other. Engaging in difficult conversations gives authenticity to the process and transforms relationships. Yong argues that dialogue and proclamation correct inaccurate stereotypes and erroneous beliefs and are essential to Christian encounter and engagement with other faiths.¹⁴⁷

Strategies for Effective Dialogue in Interreligious Contexts

Dupuis offers strategies for the praxis of dialogue in interreligious contexts beginning with a positive disposition that consciously sets aside past differences to bring about dialogue in

¹⁴⁴ O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis' Contributions," 389.

¹⁴⁵ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 7.

¹⁴⁶ O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis' Contributions," 390.

¹⁴⁷ Yong, "P(new)matological Paradigm," 182.

collaboration, and encounter instead of confrontation. While these are difficult prescriptions, Dupuis suggests that leaving behind stubborn misunderstandings¹⁴⁸ stemming from ignorance and malice, and biased interpretations of data, facts, and texts about the religious traditions of others is a start. The goal of dialogue is unity and communion, but union, he explains, does not mean uniformity, and communion is not the same as conformity.¹⁴⁹ Interreligious dialogue is mutually enriching in the empathy shown by trying to understand others as they understand themselves, accepting them even in their difference and in their irreducible personal identity. It is an encounter of the mutual complementarity, and its authenticity depends on the depth of engagement that includes having difficult conversations.¹⁵⁰

Second, Dupuis argues that dialogue cannot begin with exclusivism, but with the right disposition and sensitivity in the use of the right language. Exclusivist phrases like “outside the Church there is no salvation” or referring to adherents of other faiths with pejorative terminology like “pagan,” “infidel,” “non-believer,” or even “non-Christian” is offensive today and detrimental to authentic dialogue.¹⁵¹ All parties must exercise prudence in communication not only in daily conversation, but also in written texts, lyrics, plays, and other media.

Lastly, the aspect of faith that unites believers is prayer. The Spirit of God is in the prayer of every person that according to Dupuis transforms interreligious dialogue into the important evangelizing task of the Church, one that promotes peace and unity.

¹⁴⁸ It is difficult to erase the past from memory, but one can remember the past differently in a renewed way.

¹⁴⁹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 7.

¹⁵⁰ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 7.

¹⁵¹ Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 6.

6.2.3 Assessment: From Dialogue to Encounter

Among the criticisms of Dupuis' work is its failure to uphold the Christ-event as "definitive." Such criticisms are understandable as they suggest that Christ's salvation is "universal" and "constitutive" rather than "absolute."¹⁵² Dupuis' explanation is Thomistic in that "only God, who is totally necessary, utterly unconditional, uncaused, and unlimited, is truly absolute." Dupuis does not suggest that Christ is one Savior among many. His project accepts the positive value of other religions without rejecting Christ's uniqueness as the universal Savior. O'Collins defends Dupuis' sensitivity to the created character of the humanity Christ assumed and his redemptive, human actions in God's act of the Incarnation. Dupuis believes that God's self-revelation is complete in Christ, but the "fullness" of this revelation is "still to come" (DV §4). Therefore, he contends human knowledge of God is neither absolute nor definitive.¹⁵³

For Dupuis, the complementarity between religions is asymmetrical. Acknowledgment of additional and autonomous values of truth and grace in other religions does not diminish the unsurpassable transcendence of God's revelation and self-communication in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The asymmetry lies in the fact that some traditions more than others vividly express certain theological insights. The Spirit and the Word work together in the economy of salvation. Jesus does not exhaust the salvific action of the *Logos* who has been active before and after the Incarnation. Likewise, Dupuis argues that the Spirit works not only through the risen Christ, but operates beyond the Church enriching religions, nations, and cultures.

Dupuis' "inclusive pluralism" and FABC's "receptive pluralism" are not mutually exclusive concepts and do not only apply to interfaith situations. The fruitfulness of inclusion is in the positive reception by the "other" in interreligious and ecumenical contexts. Kalliath

¹⁵² O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis' Contributions," 391.

¹⁵³ O'Collins, "Jacques Dupuis' Contributions," 391.

argues that this calls for an attitudinal shift on the part of Christians, from an exclusive and absolutist monologue to an inclusive and open dialogue in interfaith fellowship.¹⁵⁴ He writes, “Interfaith dialogue is an ongoing pilgrimage of common search which will lead us to mutual understanding as well as truth about God and the human person.”¹⁵⁵ It is a dialogue of salvation, and therefore, the Church must be a community in dialogue upholding ‘receptive pluralism.’¹⁵⁶ Another way of thinking of these concepts is that dialogue can be inclusive, but it is an encounter only when positively received. This chapter addressed a number of ways a positive disposition can transform dialogue into encounter.

Under the prefecture of Joseph Ratzinger, the CDF censured Dupuis and Phan for their respective positions on the salvific status of other religions. The CDF’s *Dominus Iesus*, a document that says nothing new, was a setback to ecclesial efforts to be a Church with open doors initiated at Vatican II. It is also surprising that such a document was released during the papacy of John Paul II as it conflicts with *Redemptoris missio* and “Dialogue and Proclamation” as well as those elements of the constitutions, declarations, and decrees of Vatican II concerning the Church’s collaborative and dialogical outreach with other religions.

The Dupuis and FABC/Phan Christian theologies of religious pluralism are a search for a new paradigm of pneumatology that includes the plural presence of the unitive Spirit. In this new paradigm, dialogue envisions encounter with all Christians and religions. Francis exemplified his call for dialogue through encounter during a visit to the U.A.E. in February 2019, the first time a Catholic pope set foot on the Arabian Peninsula. He traveled to Abu Dhabi on a three-day mission to promote peace and interreligious dialogue among Christians and Muslims,

¹⁵⁴ Kalliath, “Christian Pilgrimage,” 10.

¹⁵⁵ Kalliath, “Christian Pilgrimage,” 12.

¹⁵⁶ FABC, I. Plenary Assembly Statement, 1974, 14 (14), in Kalliath, “The Christian Pilgrimage,” 12.

and with influential Muslim civic and religious leaders in the region.¹⁵⁷ In advance of the visit, the UAE declared 2019 the year of religious tolerance. Francis' itinerary included a private meeting with the Muslim Council of Elders, an interreligious meeting, and a papal Mass on February 5¹⁵⁸ attended by more than 180,000 faithful from across the seven emirates and beyond. Rabbis, swamis, imams, cardinals, and lay faithful from the Chaldean, Coptic, Greek-Catholic, Greek-Melchite, Latin, Maronite, Syro-Catholic, Syro-Malabar, and the Syro-Malankar churches, as well as several thousand Muslims attended the Mass.¹⁵⁹ The Grand Imam of Egypt, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, called on the Middle East to embrace Christians. He referred to the multitude as citizens though many who work in the U.A.E. are Christians from South and Southeast Asia. The Pope and the Imam signed "A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together"¹⁶⁰ on February 4, 2019 to mark the historic moment.

Lastly, when Christians initiate interreligious fellowship, the religious other invariably views it as another missionary stratagem to evangelize and convert under the guise of dialogue. Vatican II while opening the Church's doors to dialogue with other faiths, perhaps was also waking up to the reality that conversions are a mindset of the past. "What can the Church learn from her dialogue with other religions?" This was a question asked at a special Synod of Bishops of Asia. The bishops of Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei responded that from Muslims, prayer,

¹⁵⁷ Francis' mission is reminiscent of another Francis who eight hundred years ago in 1219 crossed enemy lines to meet the Sultan of Damietta, Egypt, during the Fifth Crusade. History records that the saint and the sultan discussed interfaith conflict and the common quest for peace, a model of interreligious dialogue for ages to come.

¹⁵⁸ "Programme of the Visit of Pope Francis to the United Arab Emirates (3-5 February 2019)," <https://uaepapalvisit.org/programme> (accessed February 5, 2019).

¹⁵⁹ Gulf News Web Report, "Pope Francis: 'Go in Peace Glorifying God by Your Life,'" Abu Dhabi, February 5, 2019, <https://gulfnews.com/uae/pope-francis-go-in-peace-glorifying-the-lord-by-your-life-1.1549336611995> (accessed February 7, 2019).

¹⁶⁰ Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyab, "Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to the United Arab Emirates (3-5 February 2019). A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" (4 February 2019, Abu Dhabi) at The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html.

fasting, and almsgiving; from Hindus, meditation and contemplation; from Buddhists, detachment from material goods and respect for life; from Confucianism, filial piety and respect for elders; from Taoism, simplicity and humility; and from Animists, reverence and respect for nature and gratitude for harvests. “The Church can learn from their rich symbolism and rites existing in their diversity of worship. The Church can, like the Asian religions, learn to be more open, receptive, sensitive, tolerant, and forgiving in the midst of plurality of religions.”¹⁶¹ Encounter with other religions teaches the Church lessons that are essential today for human flourishing and for the peaceful coexistence of the many truths that enhance our understanding of the One Truth. Open dialogue can only take place when intentions and motivations of the partners are transparent within the present ethos of pluralism.¹⁶² To close, FABC emphasizes the pilgrim paradigm of the Church’s identity that *Lumen gentium* teaches. It calls the Church “a community in pilgrimage, journeying with peoples of other faiths, towards the Kingdom that is to come.”¹⁶³ The eschatological goal of this Church in-pilgrimage is the unity of all people in the reign of God toward which Spirit advances through pilgrim Mary.

¹⁶¹ Peter C. Phan, ed., *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 39, in *The Asian Jesus*, Michael Amaladoss (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 164.

¹⁶² Kalliath, “Christian Pilgrimage,” 13.

¹⁶³ *Federation of Asian Bishops Conference*, BIRA-IV-4, 2 (300), in Kalliath, “Christian Pilgrimage,” 10.

CONCLUSION

Pilgrim Mary and the Pilgrim People of God

Apparitions and manifestations are an aspect of the cosmic mystery of Mary best understood in light of the cosmic mystery of Christ.¹ When Jesus was born to Mary, a star led the magi to the stable. When he died on the cross with Mary nearby, Scripture reveals an earthquake shook the earth. After her Transitus and Assumption, Christ continues to reveal God's presence among humanity through Mary's cosmic appearances around the world unraveling the mysterious ways in which his Spirit not only guides the Church, but all God's people. Vailankanni, Zeitoun, and Kibeho demonstrate that the phenomena of apparitions extends beyond the singular or serial visions experienced by a select few to Mary's direct intervention in earthly affairs, the reception of these events, and their ecclesial implications. In a sense, apparitions exemplify the mustard seed principle evolving from a private revelation in an obscure place to a cultic movement that attracts the devout in the thousands on a pilgrimage of faith especially when the supernatural event is associated with miraculous healing.

Pilgrimage is an ancient religious practice found in all faiths. Amaladoss writes that Hindus travel to Varanasi or Hrishikesh, Buddhists visit Bodhgaya where Buddha attained enlightenment, and *Hajj*, a pilgrimage to the Kaaba in Mecca at least once in a Muslim's lifetime, is one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith.² Pilgrims desire to make these journeys to places where there is revelation of a self-manifestation of God's power through healing and granting of favors. To feel worthy of receiving divine self-manifestation, they prepare themselves by praying, fasting, or performing acts of penance. However, these places of pilgrimage are a goal, not an

¹ Charlene Spretnak, *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven and Her Re-Emergence in the Modern Church* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 88. Also see Fernandes, "Mary," 23, n. 92.

² Amaladoss, *Asian Jesus*, 161.

end. The sense of *communitas* that pilgrims experience at these sacred destinations must become lived experiences that transcend the boundaries of social and religious divisions in the daily negotiations of life.³ Marian apparitions manifest this presence of God in community. They lead to divine encounter not simply in the place made sacred through miraculous events, but through the shared experience of a common history, a common identity, and a common source of strength found in the person of Mary.⁴ Pilgrim Mary manifests the accompaniment of the Spirit, so human beings are never alone on this journey. Divine encounter then is not a distant horizon, but present in contemporary history.⁵ Therefore, the sense of *communitas* that typifies the pilgrimage experience must take on an iterative and emulative quality in the global human community through dialogical encounter. Michael Di Giovine writes, “Sacred journeys are predicated on the perspectival way of seeing not only the hyper-meaningful site, but of the traveler’s actions in relation to others. *Communitas* is encouraged by certain elements within the social structure of the travel experience, and evoked in spite of others.”⁶ The common goal of pilgrimage is what unites pilgrims despite their diversity. The term ‘*communitas*’ itself implies the existence of class, linguistic, economic, political and cultural differences, but the structure of pilgrimage cultivates a collective sense of journeying above and beyond such marked differences that define daily social relations. Di Giovine affirms that secular and religious pilgrims create their own society within the spaces of pilgrimage, united for a higher purpose that lays the foundation for developing peaceful relations.⁷

³ Amaladoss, *Asian Jesus*, 161.

⁴ Amaladoss, *Asian Jesus*, 163. Adapting Amaladoss thought on “common experience” of pilgrimages to Marian apparitions.

⁵ Amaladoss, *Asian Jesus*, 164.

⁶ Michael A. Di Giovine, “A Higher Purpose: Sacred Journeys as Spaces for Peace in Christianity,” in *Pilgrims and Pilgrimages as Peacemakers in Christianity, Judaism and Islam*, ed. Antón M. Pazos (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 35.

⁷ Di Giovine, “Higher Purpose,” 37.

Chapter VII of *Lumen gentium* describes the Church as a Pilgrim Church with an eschatological nature that will unite her with the Church of the end times. In this Church in-pilgrimage, we have in Mary a mother, sister, and companion who in a sense was on pilgrimage throughout her earthly life. The reported apparitions of the Blessed Virgin are manifestations of the Spirit's action accompanying the Church on this sacred journey. Along the way, the Spirit through Mary comforts the afflicted, those who experience exclusion, marginalization and oppression in the daily encounters of life giving them hope and teaching them to preserve faith.

Lumen gentium notes that in Jesus' public life, Mary made significant appearances advancing in her own pilgrimage of faith.⁸ After his death and resurrection, she kept the apostles united and remained with them praying until the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Austin Vaughn describes her as the dawn of the Church. In this last scene in which she figures in scripture, Mary's presence is important because she became the focal point of unity for those present in the cenacle awaiting the Paraclete who later dispatched the apostles to go make disciples by bringing the light of Christ to the ends of the earth.⁹ In a mystical and spiritual sense, Mary's going cosmic has carried Christ's light and message around the world as an instrument of the Holy Spirit.

Marian apparitions have an eschatological character in that they signify an anticipation of the Parousia. They are a way of preparing the way for Christ's second coming as Mary instructed the visionaries of Kibeho. They remind the people of God of the need for fervent prayer, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Lochet argues that pilgrimages provide the devout opportunities for renewal in the Spirit. Apparitions and pilgrimages together with

⁸ LG §58.

⁹ Austin Vaughn, "Mary—Dawn of Redemption: Excerpts from a transcription of the Presentation," *Marian Studies* 39, no. 11 (1988): 75-76.

miracles, cures, conversions, and the pouring forth of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation are not only a manifestation of the power of the resurrection, but the inauguration of a new state of humankind and of things that Christ will establish at the eschaton.¹⁰

Even though only a select few are visionaries of Marian apparitions, through the narrative that unfolds and mobilizes the sense of the faithful, all get to glimpse the love of God through Marian apparitions. Daley calls Mary a “woman of many names” because she is a person of typological significance, a figure of icons, one better encountered through vision than with a rationalizing mind. She is a model of discipleship for all her earthly children. He claims that through her apparitions, Mary has graced simple people in time and space through which they discover God’s love, a love that reaches inside them, reshapes their temporal existence, and teaches them to hope for its perfection and fulfillment in Jesus Christ.¹¹ Johnson, however, finds referring to Mary in typological and symbolic terms leads the faithful to lose sight of her identity as a human person.¹² What is important is the memory of her Jewish roots as a poor peasant woman whose partnership with the Spirit creates “liberating energies for justice.”¹³

Of the eschatological reign, Schmemmann writes, “The end is thus always the beginning of all things made new. And the first revelation of these ‘last things,’ of that consummation in God, the first epiphany by the Holy Spirit of the reality of the Kingdom is *Mary*.”¹⁴ Mary’s presence in the Church gives the faithful some insight into the reign of God, and exemplifies what it means to be fully oneself, and yet fully united with God. Without this “existential knowledge” and Mary’s constant presence in the Church, Schmemmann affirms that, “all this would have remained

¹⁰ Lochet, *Apparitions of Our Lady*, 76, 80.

¹¹ Daley, “Woman of Many Names,” 868-869.

¹² Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 99.

¹³ Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 112.

¹⁴ Schmemmann, “Our Lady and the Holy Spirit,” 76.

mere doctrinal ‘propositions,’” that cannot be verified existentially and truly appropriated as dogma.¹⁵ He explains that a Church without an eschatological experience of the “last things” in contemporary history is one reduced to an agency of social reform and worldly service, practicing a secularized Christianity without the Holy Spirit and without Mary. It is from that experience that the Church gains knowledge for her praxis in the world. For this reason, the Church must re-immense herself in making an experience of the “last things” a reality for all Christians. This re-immersion, Schmemmann asserts, would not be possible without the rediscovery of the eschatological dimension of the mystery of Mary, and without our learning to contemplate and experience her in the mystery of God’s reign as revealed by the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ Though some Marian apparitions are more explicit in their messages, all have a general theme that calls humanity to holiness, to renewal, to unity, and a return to God, giving humanity an experience of the “last things” in the contemporary age. With the progress toward building communion with other Christian churches and with other religions, the Church in-pilgrimage is already experiencing the “last things” in a fragmentary way without denying the persecution she continues to experience in contexts around the world threatened by the growth of Christianity.

Presenting another Marian eschatological perspective, Matthew Morry states that Mary is the type of the Church in-pilgrimage, to be perfected in the world to come (*LG* §68) in the context of her eschatology realized. To understand what this means, he argues one must not reflect upon Mary simply from a human, socio-cultural existential context but seek to encounter her within the reality of the Incarnation. Her response in faith at the Annunciation entered her into the mystery of God’s salvific act and God’s eschatological presence. Though Mary knew

¹⁵ Schmemmann, “Our Lady and the Holy Spirit,” 76.

¹⁶ Schmemmann, “Our Lady and the Holy Spirit,” 76-77.

who her Son was, she was constantly contemplating from a human standpoint the dynamic self-revelation of the Spirit who was the eschatological presence of God in her reality.¹⁷

In a similar vein, the Church is constantly becoming aware of the transcendent mode of her existence and identity. She proclaims the Assumption as the eschatological fulfillment in Mary of her own divine predestination.¹⁸ Morry affirms that the reality of the saving act of Jesus Christ now becomes the history of all believers who are both in *process* and in *possession*,¹⁹ just as Mary was in her existential reality. Believers are in “process” of fulfilling what the saving act of Christ demands (faith, obedience to the gospel, discipleship), and in “possession” of the presence of the Holy Spirit transforming humanity into the very type of what it should be in the eschatological reality of God’s presence—exemplars of faith, love, repentance, unity.²⁰ Only Jesus, Morry reaffirms, is in full possession of the eternal fulfillment. His Church is still in-pilgrimage experiencing and glimpsing the reality of the eschaton in contemporary history. Believers share this eschatological experience of the Church by participating in the saving act of Christ, at the source of which stands Mary because of her “yes” at the Annunciation. The Holy Spirit identified and prepared her for her role in the Incarnation and the Redemption, a role that she fulfilled in human history, and one that she continues to carry out in the eternal presence of God²¹ by being our constant companion.

Phan describes the ‘kingdom values’ of the reign of God as God’s saving presence “that brings about gratuitous forgiveness and reconciliation and restores universal justice and peace between God and humanity, among humans themselves, and between humanity and the

¹⁷ Matthew F. Morry, “Mary, Type of the Church: Eschatology Realized,” *Marian Studies* 45, no. 14 (1994), 279-280.

¹⁸ Morry, “Mary, Type of the Church,” 277.

¹⁹ Morry, “Mary, Type of the Church, 276.

²⁰ Morry, “Mary, Type of the Church, 277.

²¹ Morry, “Mary, Type of the Church, 278.

cosmos.”²² Through Marian apparitions, the Spirit is calling God’s people to be pilgrims for peace, to mend broken relationships, and to take care of one another. These ‘kingdom values’ in Jesus’ preaching and in the Spirit’s messages through Mary is characteristic of modern apparitions. When Mary has remained silent, as at Knock and Zeitoun, she has left open the interpretation as to her purpose through other signs and symbols. In interpreting these messages, how can the local church realize these ‘kingdom values’? The answer lies in both dialogue and proclamation, the two essential tasks of evangelization articulated in Chapter 6.

Phan claims that the realization of God’s reign calls for a more *dialogical* church. It is through encounter with all Christians and religions that a dialogue of life, of action, of theological exchange, and of religious experience takes place.²³ Vailankanni and Zeitoun exemplify the need for such dialogical encounter. Noting John O’Malley’s writings on Vatican II, Richard Gaillardetz affirms that this dialogical vision of church is rooted in the Trinitarian origins of both creation and divine revelation. He points out that in *Dei Verbum* (§5) it is the Holy Spirit that allows the church to receive God’s Word, constantly perfecting the faithful with the Spirit’s gifts (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord) so that revelation finds deeper meaning in ecclesial life and bears the fruits of the Spirit’s work. Therefore, to the council’s priorities for ecclesial dialogue (episcopal collegiality (LG §23), the sense of the faithful (LG §12), and the need for bishops to consult the faithful (LG §37))²⁴ one must add the *ad extra* priorities of Christian and interreligious unity. This was Paul VI’s exhortation in *Ecclesiam suam* for the edification of the eschatological reign.

²² Phan, “Church in Asian Perspective,” 279.

²³ Phan, “Church in Asian Perspective,” 280.

²⁴ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 49-50.

This study has reiterated the thesis that Marian apparitions are manifestations of the Spirit's action giving witness to the various ways divine graces flow to the whole people of God. At the outset, theologians of the West, particularly the United States where reception to Mary is somewhat muted, were urged to pay attention to these events and their permanent, prophetic, and eschatological implications. These implications are not limited to the church in the local contexts of apparitions. They are also applicable to the West where other religions arrive on the tails of immigrants. The global reach of these implications suggest that whether it is *Arrokiya Matha*, *Umm al-Noor*, or *Nyina wa Jambo* appearing in particular contexts, Marian apparitions express the oneness of Mary operating under the auspices of the Spirit. She accompanies all of God's people towards the eschatological reign where God will be "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28) and where each soul will have its own triumphant song proclaiming the great things God has done.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Timeline of Events Associated with the Apparitions of Mother of Health, Vailankanni¹

ca. 50 C.E.	First voyage of St. Thomas the Apostle to India (Syro-Malabar tradition). Arrives at Muziris (in modern-day Kerala) and establishes first Christian communities along the Malabar Coast. Later travels to Tamil Nadu.
July 3, 72	St. Thomas killed at St. Thomas Mount (Madras) and interred at Mylapore (Syrian Christian tradition).
232	Remains of St. Thomas translated from Mylapore to Edessa, Mesopotamia (Syrian Christian tradition).
May 20, 1498	Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, arrives in India at Kozhikode (Calicut) on the Malabar Coast.
1505-1961	Portuguese rule in India with Goa as headquarters. <i>Padroado</i> system in India abolished in 1949. Goa attains independence in 1961.
1531	Aztec peasant Juan Diego reports apparition of the Virgin Mary at Guadalupe, Mexico on December 12.
1540s	Jesuits arrive in India.
1545-1563	Council of Trent.
ca. 1570	Mary appears to a Hindu shepherd boy named Tamil Krishnannesti Sankaranarayanan (oral tradition). Matha Kulam Church later built near the site where she appeared.
ca. 1597	Mary appears to a buttermilk vendor, crippled son of a poor Hindu widow, at <i>Nadu Thittu</i> (oral tradition). Catholic gentleman from Nagapattinam finances building small thatched chapel at Nadu Thittu in honor of the Virgin Mary.
1599	Synod of Udayamperur (Diamper) brings Syrian Christians into communion with Rome.
1605-1825	Dutch rule in India. Syrian Christians covertly persecuted. Records destroyed. Shrine development stagnates.
Mid-17 th C	Manifestation of the Blessed Virgin saves 150 Portuguese sailors during a violent tempest in the Bay of Bengal on September 8, feast of the Nativity of Mary (oral tradition). After the storm ceases, their ship lands on the shores of Vailankanni.

¹ Timeline prepared with details from titles by Gabriel et al. (2005), Santos (1983), and other authors cited in chapter 3.

	Portuguese expand original chapel built by Catholic man from Nagapattinam. New chapel consecrated to <i>Nossa Senhora da Saude</i> .
	Feast of Our Lady of Good Health celebrated annually on September 8 preceded by a nine-day festival.
1771	Dutch control of Nagapattinam ends. Vailankanni becomes an independent parish. Franciscan missionaries are custodians of the shrine until 1889.
1883	<i>Madras District Gazetteer – Tanjore</i> publishes an account of Vailankanni, calling the village of Velanganni, the ‘Lourdes of India’ (only known historical record of the apparitions at Vailankanni, and the pilgrimage festival).
1920	Nave of the Shrine elongated. Two Gothic domes constructed.
1928	Southern side of the shrine extended.
1933	Two wings added on either side of the altar on the northern end that together with the expanded vestry behind the altar forms the shape of a Latin cross.
1952	The shrine falls under the Diocese of Thanjavur. Rajarethinam Arockiaswamy Sundaram is bishop of the new diocese.
1960 – Present	Growth of neo-pentecostal churches in south India.
1962 – 1965	Second Vatican Council. Bishop Sundaram petitions John XXIII to elevate status of the Shrine of Our Lady of Health during the council.
November 3, 1962	John XXIII elevates Vailankanni Shrine to the status of ‘minor basilica,’ linking her to the major basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. Since then the church is known as the ‘Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni.’
December 6, 1992	Hindu nationalists destroy Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.
1998	Hindu nationalist party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), wins national elections by a convincing margin.
1998 – Present	Persecutions of Muslims and Christians peak during periods when BJP is at the helm.
2002	World Day of the Sick celebrated at Vailankanni for the 50 th anniversary of the shrine’s elevation to the status of minor basilica.
2014, 2019	BJP wins national parliamentary elections by landslides. Future of Muslims and Christians in India remains uncertain.

Appendix B

Timeline of Events Associated with the Apparitions at Zeitoun²

6 to 4 B.C.E	Flight of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to Egypt (Christian tradition).
August 21, 1879	Blessed Virgin appears to 15 visionaries aged 5 to 75 in Knock, Ireland.
1917	Reported appearances of the Virgin Mary in Fátima, Portugal. Coptic reports claim she gave a special message to Lúcia dos Santos for the Catholic pope. Message transcribed in a letter to remain sealed for 50 years. When opened in 1967, Egypt would suffer defeat in war, but the Virgin would protect her.
1925	Virgin believed to have appeared to a wealthy Coptic landowner requesting him to stop building his house, to donate the land, and build a church in her honor. The Church of St. Mary in Zeitoun stands on the site of the owner's property.
1952-1956	Gamal Abdel Nasser and Mohamed Naguib overthrow Egyptian monarchy in 1952. Naguib becomes first President of Egypt. In 1954, Naguib placed under house arrest and Nasser installs himself as second President of Egypt. Introduces land reforms. Formal election takes place in 1956.
July 13-14, 1962	Virgin Mary reportedly appears to an eighteen-year old girl named Ramute Macyyte-Matiukaite at Janonis in the parish of Skiemoniū, Lithuania. At night on July 14, she informs her that she would not appear at the spot again, but "will appear in Egypt with two angels."
June 5-10, 1967	Six-Day War between Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Israel emerges victorious. On June 11, a ceasefire is signed with Israel. Nasser steps down, but is reinstated after protests against his resignation.
1967 – 1970	War of Attrition between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, the Palestine Liberation Organization and their allies, ending with a ceasefire in August 1970.
March 30, 1968	Nasser issues the <i>March 30 Manifesto</i> outlining plans for Egypt's future.
Before April 2, 1968	Reports claim Virgin Mary appeared to Constantin Moussa, pastor of the Church of St. Mary in Zeitoun, announcing her impending arrival in Egypt. This is the only record of a spoken message by the Virgin in Zeitoun.
April 2, 1968	Three Muslim workers, Farouk Mohammed Atwa, Hussein Awwad, and Yacout Ali Mocamoun, while at the end of their shift at the Public Transportation System garage across St. Mary Church in Zeitoun notice an extraordinary luminous figure of a woman atop the central dome of the church. Farouk Atwa's finger, scheduled for amputation on April 3, heals while allegedly pointing at the apparition. First record of a miraculous cure at Zeitoun.

² Timeline prepared based on narratives and reports found in referenced titles by Victor DeVincenzo, Youssef Kamell et al., Otto Meinardus, Cynthia Nelson, Jerome Palmer, Pearl Zaki, and reliable internet sources. Not all events are historical fact.

April 23, 1968	Kyrillos VI appoints clerical delegation—Gregorius Matta, Hanna Abdel-Messih, and Benjamin Kamel who witness an apparition on this day. A medical commission headed by Dr. Shafim Abd-el Malek is also appointed.
April 28, 1968	Envoys of Paul VI witness the apparitions and send a report to the pope.
April 30, 1968	Vision of the Virgin lasts for more than 2 hours witnessed by a crowd of more than 100,000.
April 1968 – May 1971	Approximately 70 apparitions witnessed by Christians, Muslims, Jews, followers of other faiths, and atheists.
May 5, 1968	Coptic Orthodox Clerical Report confirming the apparitions released. Statement of Kyrillos VI approving the apparitions released.
May 5-6, 1968	All Cairo newspapers and few international papers report the Coptic Orthodox Church's statement on the apparitions.
May 6, 1968	Coptic Catholic Patriarch, Cardinal Istaphanos, releases statement for inclusion in the Government Documental Report. Government Documental Report on the apparitions released. Report also contains statement of the Archimandrite Airut of the Greek Catholic Church.
May 16, 1968	<i>The Egyptian Gazette</i> reports that the Virgin appeared at the family home of Kyrillos VI in Alexandria in 1910. Ailing member of the family healed.
June 8-9, 1968	Virgin appears continuously for more than 7 hours. Witnessed by thousands.
June 22, 1968	Paul VI returns relic of St. Mark to the Coptic Orthodox Church. The relic later interred in the new Cathedral of St. Mark, Abbasia, Cairo.
1970	Nasser dies. Anwar al-Sadat becomes third President of Egypt.
May 29, 1971	Last sighting of the Virgin at Zeitoun (generally accepted date).
October 1973	Fourth Arab-Israeli War. Ends in ceasefire on October 22.
1978-1979	Peace Accord between Israel and Egypt in 1978. In 1979, Egypt becomes first Arab nation to recognize Israel.
1980	Sadat assassinated. Muhammad Hosni El Sayed Mubarak becomes fourth President of Egypt.
2011	Arab uprising in a number of North African states, including Egypt. Mubarak deposed.
2012-2013, 2019	Mohamed Morsi becomes fifth President of Egypt, but is deposed in a coup d'état in 2013. Morsi dies in 2019.

Appendix C

Timeline of Events before, during, and after the Apparitions at Kibeho³

- 1956 André Perraudin consecrated as bishop of Kabgayi. Joins regional bishops in revisiting the Hutu-Tutsi social question.
- 1957 *Bahutu Manifesto* released by Hutu elites emphasizing Tutsi monopoly of political power creating binaries of nonindigenous versus indigenous to suggest who belonged and who did not belong to Rwanda.
- Visiting Commission of the United Nations names Hutu-Tutsi relationship and calls for decolonization and democratization of Rwanda.
- 1959 Mwami Mutara Ruhadigwa unexpectedly dies in Bujumbura. Perraudin and Belgian officials suspected of complicity in Mutara's death.
- 1962 Joseph Sibomana and Jean-Baptiste Gahamanyi consecrated as bishops of Ruhengeri and Astrida, respectively.
- Rwanda celebrates independence from colonial powers and becomes First Republic on July 1.
- 1963-1964 Government crushes rebellion of Rwandese National Union in December 1963 leading to massacre of 8,000 to 10,000 Tutsi in Gikongoro. Catholic Church condemns violence but not government. Vatican describes Gikongoro massacre as a genocide.
- 1972 Failed coup d'état by Hutu military officers in Burundi leads to the death of 200,000 Hutu by Tutsi military dictatorship. Thousands of exiles flee to Rwanda.
- 1973 General Juvénal Habyarimana leads bloodless coup d'état against President Grégoire Kayibanda to form Rwanda's Second Republic.
- 1981 First reported apparition of Mary to Alphonsine Mumureke on November 28. Mary identifies herself as *Nyina wa Jambo* (Kinyarwanda for 'Mother of the Word').
- 1982 First reported apparition of Mary to Anathalie Mukamazimpaka on January 12. Anathalie continues to have visions of Mary and Jesus through December 3, 1983. On her fourth apparition on March 2, the Virgin identified herself as *Umubyeyi w'Imana* or 'Mother of God.'
- First reported apparition of Mary to Marie-Claire Mukangango on March 2. On March 3, the Virgin told Marie-Claire to make known the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows.
- Vestine Salima claims vision of Mary and recognizes voice of Jesus on April 13. She reports an earlier brief obscure vision of Jesus who spoke to her when she was working in a bean field (1980).
- First reported apparition of Mary to Valentine Nyiramukiza on May 12. Further reports claim Valentine continues to experience apparitions to this day, the latest on May 15, 2018.

³ Timeline prepared with details from Maindron (1996), Ilibagiza (2010), Ruzindaza (2013), and Carney (2014).

Bishop Gahamanyi of Butare establishes medical commission to investigate the Kibeho apparitions on March 20. Theological commission set up on May 14.

First reported apparition of Mary to Stephanie Mukamurenzi on May 25. Through December 15, Stephanie reported 15 visions of the Virgin.

On July 2, Emmanuel Segastashya reports the first of multiple visions of Jesus. He also claims having visions of Mary.

On August 4, Agnes Kamagaju reports the first of two apparitions of the Virgin, the second occurring two days later. Reports claim that six weeks later she experienced visions of Jesus.

Alphonsine, Anathalie, and Marie-Claire reportedly shown a vision of indescribable horror and carnage on August 19.

- 1988 Gahamanyi approves public devotion to Our Lady of Kibeho on August 15.
- 1989 Last apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Alphonsine Mumureke on November 28.
- Perraudin retires and is succeeded by Thadée Nsengiyumva, a Hutu, who is critical of church and government corruption.
- 1990-1993 John Paul II visits Rwanda in 1990 and praises Perraudin. Vatican pressures Nsengiyumva to resign on eve of pope's visit. RPF invades north Rwanda in October that year with the goal of repatriating Tutsi exiles and overthrowing President Habyarimana. Multiparty elections announced in 1991. War continues through 1993; six Tutsi massacres carried out.
- 1992 Bishop Gahamanyi lays foundation stone for the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows on November 28, on the site of the first apparition at Kibeho.
- 1993 Archbishop of Kigali, Vincent Nsengiyuma, recognizes Kibeho as a place of pilgrimage on August 15.
- Arusha Peace Accord, power-sharing agreement between RPF and Rwandan government signed.
- 1994 Habyarimana killed on April 6 along with Cyprien Ntaryamira, President of Burundi, the Chief of Staff of the Rwandan military, and others when a missile struck down his plane near Kigali.
- Habyarimana's death triggers civil war and the Rwandan genocide of approximately 800,000 to 850,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu who opposed the ruling government or supported peace accords, over a period of 100 days beginning April 7.
- 1995 Tutsi-led RPF strike Kibeho camp on April 22 massacring more than 4,000 Hutu militiamen.
- 2001 Declaration on the apparitions at Kibeho during 1981-1989 released on June 29. Excerpts of the declaration read by Bishop Augustin Misago at the cathedral of Gikongoro diocese on July 2. Only first three visionaries deemed authentic.

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