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August 2024

# The “decisive battle”? Marian apocalypticism and John Paul II’s defense of marriage and the family

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies.

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## Abstract

Since the nineteenth century, church-approved Marian apparitions such as Lourdes and Fatima have multiplied, along with the number of faithful belonging to Marian apparitional movements. Such movements, inspired by the writings of the seventeenth-century priest Louis de Montfort, are often marked by strong apocalyptic attitudes interpreting the rising number of Marian apparitional claims as a warning amidst heightened tribulations. Pope John Paul II seems to have been especially receptive to such narratives due in part to his Polish background, exposing him to a deeply rooted national Marian piety and the catastrophes of life under two totalitarian regimes. As his thought developed, he adapted such Marian apocalyptic worldviews to fit into his personalist philosophy, especially emphasizing Mary's unique role as mother and mediatrix through the concept of Marian consecration. While during the twentieth century Marian apocalypticism was typically linked to anti-communism, in recent decades both proponents of Marian apocalypticism and John Paul II seem to focus increasingly on a particular issue, namely the defense of marriage and the family. These institutions are understood by them to be the decisive battleground between two sets of forces, coined by John Paul II the "culture of life" and the "culture of death," at work in the spiritual and political world. However, this connection between Marian apocalypticism and John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family has remained largely overlooked, with scholars focusing either on John Paul II's nuptial theology or solely on Marian apocalypticism, but seldom on their interactions. To fill such a lacuna, this investigation begins by situating Marian apocalypticism within the broader Catholic context, follows up by explaining John Paul

II's Marian and personalist background, and eventually looks at the distinctly Marian apocalyptic character of John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family.

## Résumé

Depuis le dix-neuvième siècle, les apparitions mariales approuvées par l'Église, telles que Lourdes et Fatima, se sont multipliées, ainsi que le nombre de membres affiliés aux mouvements découlant de ces apparitions. Ces mouvements, inspirés par les écrits de Louis de Montfort, un prêtre du dix-septième siècle, sont souvent marqués par des attitudes fortement apocalyptiques, interprétant l'augmentation du nombre des prétendues apparitions mariales comme un avertissement au milieu de tribulations grandissantes. Le Pape Jean Paul II semble avoir été particulièrement réceptif à ces narratives, en partie du fait de ses origines polonaises, l'exposant à la fois à une piété mariale nationale profondément enracinée, et à la vie catastrophique sous deux régimes totalitaires. Alors que sa pensée se développe, il adapte les vues de l'apocalypsimisme marial à sa philosophie personnaliste, soulignant le rôle unique de Marie en tant que mère et médiatrice à travers le concept de consécration mariale. Alors que, durant le vingtième siècle, l'apocalypsimisme marial était typiquement lié à l'anticommunisme, dans les dernières décennies, nous voyons que les mouvements en lien avec l'apocalypsimisme marial ainsi que Jean Paul II semblent plutôt se concentrer sur un sujet spécifique, la défense du mariage et de la famille. Ces institutions sont vues comme le champ de bataille décisif entre deux forces que Jean Paul II appelle la « culture de la vie » et la « culture de la mort » et qui seraient actives dans le monde spirituel et politique. Cependant, cette connexion entre l'apocalypsimisme marial et la défense du mariage et de la famille par Jean Paul II reste largement négligée, avec des chercheurs se concentrant soit sur la théologie nuptiale de Jean Paul II, soit sur l'apocalypsimisme marial seulement, oubliant leurs interactions. Pour combler cette lacune, cette enquête commence par situer l'apocalypsimisme marial dans le contexte plus largement

catholique, expliquant ensuite la pensée mariale et personnaliste de Jean Paul II, et terminant enfin par le caractère distinctement apocalyptique et marial de la défense du mariage et de la famille par Jean Paul II.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by rendering thanks unto the Triune God Who has so generously revealed Himself to humanity so that we may share in His Blessed Life. Having given us His Son as Lord and Redeemer, He gave also His Mother, the Immaculate one, to be Our Lady. To his disciples, Jesus does not cease to speak thus: “if you knew the gift of God.”<sup>1</sup> This desire to know the gift of God is what first set us on our journey which aim cannot be separated from loving the Bridegroom and serving His Bride the Church.

Thanks also is evidently due to my family and friends, especially to my dear mother and father for their unwavering support and strengthening example of hard work, and to my friends whose prayers and help have continued to sustain me in good and hard times. Moreover, I am grateful to all the priests, monks, and nuns who have advised me, given me courage and insights along with hospitality and much-needed peace.

When Professor Cere first mentioned the growing scholarship on Marian apparitions in one of our seminars on religion and global politics, my curiosity was piqued. I began with a research essay but the resources I found in connection to the theology of marriage and the family, another great interest of mine, led to this longer project. Professor Cere and Professor Farrow, along with the rest of the McGill School of Religious Studies, have helped me more than they could know for this work and in wider regards, they have ignited in me a great passion for this field of studies which I hope to pursue even half as well as they did.

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<sup>1</sup> John 4:10.



## I) Introduction

Among the most discussed aspects of Pope John Paul II's pontificate are its Christocentric character, the development of a nuptial theology of the body, and the defence of human dignity against communism and the modern “culture of death.” To these core elements should also be added the late Pope’s Mariology and its connections to his longstanding concern for the institutions of marriage and the family, which he regarded as theologically and socio-politically pivotal. These two themes in his work seem to converge in a further feature, namely the same note of eschatological urgency that is sounded in what some scholars have defined as modern Marian apocalypticism. This convergence is also reflected in the claims by two well-known figures in Marian apparitional movements — Sister Lucia dos Santos (one of the seers of Fatima) and Cardinal Caffarra (founding president of the Pontifical Council for Marriage and the Family) — that marriage and the family will be the decisive battleground between God and the devil. This study will explore the extent to which Marian apocalypticism may have shaped John Paul II’s defense of marriage and the family by looking at the intersections between the eschatological dimensions of his evolving Mariology and his defense of marriage and the family. We will begin by framing the concept of Marian apocalypticism as it relates to John Paul II, moving on to the Pope’s Marian and personalist background, and eventually covering the distinctly Marian apocalyptic character of John Paul II’s defense of marriage and the family.

### A) A note on vocabulary and approach

For the sake of brevity and reading flow, when referring to Marian apparitions and their visionaries, we will not always use words such as allegedly, purported, or claimed.

Yet, at no instant is the reader required to believe that such apparitions happened, nor are we ever claiming that they did. This work constitutes a historical investigation of a Catholic phenomenon, taking into account the theological framework necessary to understand key elements of our study. Thus, the starting point is on one hand human experience taken seriously, historical documents and social phenomenon, and on the other hand, the Catholic understanding that the Church is the “pillar and bulwark of truth.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we think that there is no other way to understand John Paul II’s perspective than by framing our study within the parameters of Catholic teachings. Hence, in this work, Marian apocalypticism, unless stated otherwise, will refer to those movements and worldviews within the Catholic Church which stem from approved Marian apparitions. It seems improbable that Marian apocalyptic movements diverging from the Catholic Church could have participated extensively in shaping the thinking of a Pope so committed to preserving Catholic teachings. However, we fully recognize that Marian apocalypticism as a wider notion can also encompass a wide range of movements and perspectives existing beyond the confines of the Catholic Church.

B) Marian apparitions defined and discerned

Sandra Zimdars-Swartz defined apparitions of the Virgin Mary as “an apparition (that) is best understood as a specific kind of vision in which a person or being not normally within the visionary's perceptual range appears to that person, not in a world apart as in a dream, and not as a modification of a concrete object as in the case of a weeping icon or moving statue, but as part of the environment, without apparent connection to verifiable

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<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §2032.

visual stimuli.”<sup>3</sup> The claims of Marian apparitions in the Roman Catholic Church date back from the first century, with Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza (Spain). Other famous apparitions such as Our Lady of the Snows (352), of Mount Carmel (1251), Guadalupe (1531), Rue du Bac (1830), or Lourdes (1858) do not cease to evoke certain images or devotions in the mind of millions throughout the world.

More than punctual occurrences happening every few generations or so, these apparitions seem to create influential subcultures, both within and outside of official circles of the Catholic Church. If, during an alleged apparition, the Virgin Mary expresses herself verbally – which she does not always seem to do – her message often grows far beyond the few words spoken, depending on concomitant phenomena perceived as miraculous, on dominant interpretations, and on social movements springing forth. In fact, such movements have developed immensely (for instance, the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima currently declares over twenty million members)<sup>4</sup> due mostly to two factors: technological advances which have increased the circulation of news, customs, objects, and people, and the apparent multiplication of Marian apparitions in the last couple of centuries.

Indeed, since the apparition of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal in Rue du Bac (Paris) in 1830, we have witnessed an explosion of alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary, along with a rising number of approvals issued by the Catholic hierarchy. This sudden surge of Marian apparitional claims has been the font of much interest from anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and religious studies scholars. Interestingly, Robert Orsi characterizes “Marian apparitions as alternative modernity.”<sup>5</sup> In this way, he asserts that

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<sup>3</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, Sandra. *Encountering Mary: Visions of Mary from La Salette to Medjugorje*, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> “The History of the World Apostolate of Fatima,” *World Apostolate of Fatima International Secretariat*. <https://worldfatima.com/en/about-us/history>.

<sup>5</sup> Orsi, Robert. “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” *Historically Speaking*.

Marian apparitional movements are at once capable of navigating the modern world, with its codes, technologies, and challenges, while also evolving “in a reality not completely encompassed by modern critical knowledge.”<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the common pattern observed in various Marian apparitions since the mid-nineteenth century is summarized thus by Jill Krebs: “a criticism of materialism, an *espousal of traditional nuclear families*, and politically conservative ideas (...), a context of struggle (...), globalized communication networks (...), *apocalypticism* (which) provides explanatory power and strengthens the Catholic identities of individuals within apparitional cultures.”<sup>7</sup> This last note on apocalyptic sentiments will require further explanation in our first chapter as it will be closely linked to our topic. For now, it will suffice to mention Daniel Wojcik’s analysis of what he calls Marian apocalypticism; “in the nineteenth century, apparitions of the Virgin gave birth to a distinctive and influential form of apocalypticism that developed over the years to become a prominent feature of Marian apparitions in the modern era.”<sup>8</sup>

Considering the power of Marian apparitions and the cultures they create, it is easy to understand why the Catholic Church seeks to investigate them with the utmost care. While many people claim to have received visions of the Virgin Mary, only a few apparitions have been approved by the Vatican or a Catholic Bishop. This process to gain official recognition can result in either one of three pronouncements: *constat de supernaturalitate*, *non constat de supernaturalitate*, *constat de non supernaturalitate*. The

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<sup>6</sup> Orsi, Robert. “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” *Historically Speaking*, p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Krebs, Jill. “Contemporary Marian Apparitions and Devotional Cultures,” *Religion Compass*, p.2. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>8</sup> Wojcik, Daniel. “Marian Apocalypticism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, p.648.

first instance designates the authentication of an apparition albeit a constataion of supernatural phenomenon. The second is often a reserved pronouncement, which can either remain as such or eventually become *constat de* or *constat de non*. In that case, devotion may be allowed but not promoted, and nothing from the apparition should have been found to stand against Catholic doctrine. The Church is simply awaiting further proofs (in documentation or fruits such as conversions and attested miracles) before it can express itself on whether there seems to be supernatural causes. The last category pronounces an apparition to be unworthy of belief, not of supernatural origins, and so possibly stemming from delusion, psychiatric disorders, lies, or demonic activity. The criteria of judgment include the personal qualities of seers, such as their psychological state and moral life, the fruits of an apparitional site, with miraculous healings or conversions, and the theological or doctrinal content of the apparitions.<sup>9</sup>

### C) John Paul II and the *Theology of the Body*

Born Karol Wojtyla in 1920, the first Polish Pope led the Catholic Church from 1978 to his death in 2005 and was canonized in 2014. He was the great pilgrim Pope, covering more distance than all the previous Popes combined, the ecumenical Pope, meeting and praying with leaders of all world religions, the fighting Pope, combatting communism, materialism, and other movements denying the inherent dignity of human beings, the philosophizing Pope, defending the pairing of faith and reason throughout his pontificate... But more importantly for us, he was to be also the Pope of Mary, consecrating to her his pontificate and the entire world, and the Pope of marriage and the family, writing

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<sup>9</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. "Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions or Revelations," *Vatican*.

that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family.”<sup>10</sup> How these two facets of his pontificate relate to one another will be for us to expand.

Practically speaking, the last forty years have seen a marked increase in studies on sexuality, marriage, and the family, in Catholic ethics and theology. Much of this work is in direct response to John Paul II’s major contributions of the *Theology of the Body* (see the works of Thomas Petri, Donald A. Miller, Jarostaw Kupczak, and Daniel Avila, among others, as well as popularizers of the *Theology of the Body* such as Christopher West). Several institutes have been dedicated to fostering continued research on the theology of the body and on Catholic teachings on marriage and the family. In short, while there is significant scholarly interest in his contributions to other areas of Catholic theology, as well as the impact of his pontificate on geo-politics, John Paul II’s corpus of work on sexuality, nuptiality, and the family is widely acknowledged to be his most significant and influential theological contribution.

#### D) Catholic definitions: person, marriage, and family

Before even speaking of marriage and the family, we must clarify how the Catholic Church understands the human person, for marriages and families are but specific communities of human persons. The *Catechism* states that the “human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once corporeal and spiritual.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, men and women have inherent dignity as made in the image of God, and they are made of both body and soul.

According to the *Code of Canon Law*, marriage is defined as a covenant “by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and

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<sup>10</sup> John Paul II. “*Familiaris consortio*,” *Vatican*, §86.

<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §362.

which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring.”<sup>12</sup> Family, furthermore, is formed by “a man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children.”<sup>13</sup> These are considered by the Catholic Church to be at once natural and sacred institutions which are reflective of the design of God for the upbringing and flourishing of human life. Catholic sexual ethics is thus closely linked to the upholding of Catholic teachings on the nature and mission of marriage and the family. In addition, it is inherently tied to what the Church holds as anthropological truths, regarding which John Paul II had much to say through his personalist approach.

E) Contextual gaps and the relevance of this study

Combining anthropology, sociology, political theory, history, psychology, and religious studies, academics such as Robert Orsi, Ruth Harris, William Christian, Elisabeth Claverie, and Peter Margry have investigated the significance of Marian apparitions in relation to a complex range of issues such as popular Catholicism, alternative modernities, political mobilization, identity, and Church politics. Moreover, apparitional movements have been closely associated with major Catholic doctrines such as Mary’s Immaculate Conception and Assumption, Marian doctrines that have only been officially recognized and defined in the modern era. Catholic theologians such as René Laurentin and Mark Miravalle have also begun to highlight the relevance of Marian apparitions to evolving theological discussions in Catholicism. However, interdisciplinary research and devotional and theological works in Mariology are seldom placed in conversation, which could greatly benefit these emerging fields of scholarship.

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<sup>12</sup> *Code of Canon Law* §1055.1.

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §2202.

Furthermore, the extensive literature on John Paul II has usually treated his contributions to a theology of marriage and family in isolation from his Mariology. Insufficient attention has been paid to the points of intersection between his Mariology and his theology of sexuality and nuptiality and to the major influences shaping those intersections, especially personalism. One exception to this would be Danielle Peters, who has written several articles on such connections. The impact of Montfortian spirituality on the Pope whose motto was borrowed from Louis de Montfort's most influential work is also broadly left aside apart from Marian studies. For example, George Weigel's thousand-page bibliography briefly alludes to John Paul II's interest in Montfort but does not provide any exploration of its significance. Though relatively unknown outside of sectors of popular Catholicism, Montfort's work has been foundational for modern Marian movements, especially Marian apocalypticism. Montfort contends that, just as Mary had played a unique role in the coming of the Christ, so she would play a unique role in preparing for his return. This characteristic vision of history as entering a Marian age was embraced by John Paul II. Yet, as neither Louis de Montfort nor John Paul II ever developed a systematized theology of history, their eschatological and sometimes apocalyptic views are rarely wrestled with. This is especially problematic when we hear from John Paul II himself that preparing the Church to enter the third millennium constitutes "a hermeneutical key" to understand his entire pontificate.<sup>14</sup>

This study will attempt to clarify the ways in which John Paul II's Marian apocalypticism shaped his work in defense of marriage and the family. Interestingly, doing so will also point to the fact that John Paul II opened up a space for Marian apocalypticism

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<sup>14</sup> John Paul II. "*Tertio millennio adveniente*," *Vatican*, §23.



to be more widely accepted in the Church, in turn reinforcing the power of such worldviews and movements. Henceforth, this thesis could contribute to bridging gaps perceived by some Marian apparitional scholars between popular and hierarchical Catholicism while enriching theological horizons on Mariology as it relates to marriage and the family, along with filling holes in our historical and political understanding of one of the most influential pontificates in modern history.

#### F) Structure

To investigate the influence of Marian apocalypticism on John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family, we will begin by introducing the framework and history of Marian apocalypticism. This will include discussions on public and private revelations, eschatology and the theology of history, the distinction between apocalypticism and apocalypse, a brief account of the history of Marian apparitions and how the phenomenon developed into what we now call Marian apocalypticism, with its patterns, worldviews, and proponents. Secondly, we will examine in John Paul II's background guiding themes which underlined his defense of marriage and the family, namely his Marian devotion and spirituality and how it connected to his personalist philosophy, which constituted the basis of his understanding of human dignity as upheld by marriage and the family. This chapter will include discussions on John Paul II's Polish Marian devotions, his family, his emphasis on consecration and his experience of Vatican II. Thirdly, we will look at what John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family consisted of, paying a particular attention to its often eschatological and even apocalyptic notes along with the role played by Mary in such a defense. It will become increasingly clear that the defense of marriage and the family

(along with surrounding issues such as the fight for the protection of life and the promotion of the role and dignity of women) become an intrinsic part of John Paul II's Marian apocalypticism. While the Pope is indebted to Montfort for the foundations of his Mariology, his original contribution lies in inscribing marriage and the family in his Marian apocalyptic narrative.

## II) A brief history of Marian apocalypticism

In considering the impact of Marian apocalypticism on John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family, we must begin by clarifying what we mean by Marian apocalypticism, along with providing an overview of the phenomenon, its stages of development, its worldviews, and its proponents. Therefore, in this chapter, we will go through a brief history of Marian apparitions, starting with apparitional traditions in the Early Church and Medieval eras to the significant growth of apparitional movements in the modern era. This chapter will also explore the shift represented by Louis de Montfort's contribution to Mariology, eschatology, and Marian devotion. This overview will allow us to discern global patterns and worldviews common to modern Marian apparitional movements. This chapter will also attempt to position the discussion of Marian apocalypticism within the frame of Catholic teachings on the role of private revelations, eschatology, and apocalypticism.

### A) Private revelations in Catholicism

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that "Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect, and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; *there will be no other word than this one.*"<sup>15</sup> This means that Jesus Christ is considered by Christians to be the fullness of divine revelation and that there is no further revelation to be awaited. "Christian faith cannot accept 'revelations' that claim to surpass or correct the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfillment."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §65. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>16</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §67.

However, the next paragraphs of the *Catechism* address the issue of private revelations, which include Marian apparitions among others. Marian apparitions are not part of the deposit of faith but can help shape the response of the faithful: “it is not their role to improve or complete Christ’s definitive Revelation, but *to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history*.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Marian apparitions and other private revelations can be accepted by the Catholic Church after investigation but do not bind the faithful in matters of faith. They can be adopted or rejected by Catholics without impacting their standing within the Church.

The French historian Yves Chiron, while searching for the earliest records of Marian apparitions, further helps us by differentiating between private apparitions with a private character (meant for the edification of the seers only) and private apparitions with a public character (encouraging the building of a shrine for instance):

L’apparition à Grégoire le Thaumaturge (231) est donc la plus ancienne apparition de la Vierge actuellement attestée, apparition à caractère privé, c’est-à-dire destinée essentiellement à l’édification personnelle du voyant. Tandis que l’apparition au Puy serait la plus ancienne apparition publique, c’est-à-dire destinée à l’édification de tous les fidèles par la construction d’un sanctuaire. (Chiron, p.59)<sup>18</sup>

While most private revelations with a private character are never brought up to Church authorities, the Church has desired to approve some private revelations with a public character, such as the message of Divine Mercy by Faustina Kowalska. This is done to affirm that a certain private revelation is “worthy of belief” and beneficial for the sanctification of souls. The purpose of approved private revelations with a public character

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<sup>17</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §67. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>18</sup> “The apparition to Gregory Thaumaturgus (231) is thus the most ancient apparition of the Virgin actually attested, apparition with a private character, meaning that it is destined essentially to the personal edification of the seer. While the apparition of Le Puy would be the most ancient one with a public character, signifying that it is destined to the edification of all the faithful through the building of a shrine.” Translation is mine.

is to help Catholics follow more closely the Gospel within their historical context by placing emphasis on one or several facets of the Christian faith especially needed in a specific time and place.

We can illustrate the role of private revelations with a public character in the Church by using the interpretation of the message of Fatima by a leading Mariologist, Stefano Di Fiores. He writes that the message of Fatima teaches that the future of humanity can be changed through prayer, penitence, and sacrifices because God desires to have humans as collaborators in his plan for salvation.<sup>19</sup> This highlights several components which Catholics may find useful to be reminded of: God does not wish to punish sinners but rather to see them repent; freedom is a real and intrinsic part of human life against any fatalistic misconceptions; and daily prayers and sacrifices can be offered by all the baptized as a participation in the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ. This message shared in a time of world wars may have helped numberless Christians in persevering with hope through their sufferings, realising with a sense of purpose that they too have power to help humanity at large through seemingly insignificant actions such as penances and prayers. This intertwining of the historical with the eternal is inherent to the Christian theological perspective where the infinite God is believed to enter finite humanity.

#### B) Catholic eschatology and apocalypticism

To grasp John Paul II's understanding of the eschatological nature of Marian apparitions, we should begin by clarifying the Catholic understanding of history. In Augustine's *City of God*, the Christian perception of human history is linear: there is a

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<sup>19</sup> Di Fiores, Stefano. *Il segreto di Fatima : Una luce sul futuro del mondo*, p.16-17.

beginning, a middle, and an end. Unlike ancient Greek philosophers, Catholics do not view history as cyclical. According to Catholic teachings, the world was created *ex nihilo*, it is sustained by a loving Creator, and it will eventually come to consummation, so that the world as we know it will end and be fully renewed.

The theological study of the last things (commonly categorized as death, judgment, heaven, and hell) is called eschatology, and it includes at once the particular end of each person and the cosmic events culminating in the end of this world.<sup>20</sup> Among such events, we can mention the apostasy in and from the Church, the conversion of Israel and the rising of the Antichrist, the return of Christ in glory and the Last Judgment.<sup>21</sup> It is the universal aspect of eschatology that will mostly receive our attention in this study. What the end of the world will look like exactly cannot be fully comprehended, but through the prophecies found in the Old and New Testaments (specifically in Daniel, Isaiah, the Gospel of Matthew, the Letters to the Thessalonians, and the Book of Revelation) theologians can discern several key points which we will cover further.

The word “apocalypse” means “revelation” or “unveiling” in Greek, and it can also refer generally to the Book of Revelation, the last of the Christian canon. Apocalyptic literature in the Bible is usually marked by supernatural revelations pertaining to an eschatological judgment, mediated through a heavy use of symbols, and interpreted by a heavenly mediator, such as an angel or a saint.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, while we will retain the definition of eschatology presented in the paragraph above, the *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* helpfully distinguishes eschatology from apocalypticism (as a literary genre):

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<sup>20</sup> Toner, Patrick. “Eschatology,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>21</sup> Farrow, Douglas. *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, p.198-242.

<sup>22</sup> Arnold, Bill T. “Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, p.33.

As it relates to the Hebrew scriptures, eschatology is the expectation of a future eon discontinuous with the present, in which the circumstances of history will be transformed and the present cosmos redeemed by God. Such a conviction that the intrinsic depravity of the present world will someday be overturned results in an eschatological ethic, calling upon God's people to live faithfully to the covenant and the righteousness enjoined by the prophets. This definition is not bound to any distinct genre, since eschatology is characterized by themes and motifs possible in prose, poetry, or any manner of literary form. By contrast, "apocalypse" is necessarily genre-specific. It is paradoxically both easy to define because it constitutes a convergence of characteristics marking it as a genre of literature, and difficult to define because that convergence is not entirely obvious. By definition, apocalypse always foresees eschatological salvation, but not all eschatology is expressed in apocalyptic form. (Arnold, p.32)

In this work the use of the term apocalypticism goes beyond the literary genre and extends to devotional and social movements which expect the imminent, and one day immediate, end of the world as prophesied in Scriptures. What the Church teaches concerning an imminent *versus* immediate end is better exposed through a both/and approach: since the Ascension of Jesus, it is both the end and not the end yet. It is the imminent end insofar as we have now received the fullness of divine revelation and that Jesus has triumphed over death and evil through the Crucifixion and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Yet, it is not the immediate end as it pertains to the entire sequence of events prophesied to mark the last days, beyond which there will be "new heavens and a new earth."<sup>23</sup> As Farrow notes in his commentary on Thessalonians 1 and 2, it is important to distinguish between a doctrine of imminency and one of immediacy.<sup>24</sup> Augustine points to this paradoxical attitude between knowledge and ignorance, terror and expectation, now and not yet:

The last judgment is that which he shall settle on earth; coming to effect it out of heaven... And this judgment shall consist of these circumstances, partly precedent and partly adjacent: Elijah shall come, the Jews shall believe, Antichrist shall persecute, Christ shall judge, the dead shall arise, the good and bad shall sever, the

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<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1.

<sup>24</sup> Farrow, Douglas. *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, p.200-201.

world shall burn and be renewed. All this we must believe shall be, but how and in what order, our full experience then shall exceed our imperfect intelligence as yet. (Augustine, XX.30)

While persecutions, earthquakes, famines and wars have been an unfortunate part of history for millennia, Catholics believe that a time will come when these signs, accompanied by others just mentioned, will indeed prophesy the immediate end of history. Therefore, believers are called to “be sober, be watchful,”<sup>25</sup> knowing that signs of an imminent end have accompanied humanity for centuries while remembering that they will also one day be signs of an immediate end. Not all voices who cry wolf will be mistaken, a day will come with the wolf – and the Lamb. Similarly, not all forms of apocalypticism would correspond to Catholic teachings but a complete absence of apocalyptic sentiments would also diverge from what the Church believes. This perspective requires the Church to discern false warnings and alarmist prophecies from the signs that shall pass to mark the end. Hopeful watchfulness is the appropriate attitude as Joseph Ratzinger notes in *Eschatology*:

The signs, at any rate as we have considered them so far, do not permit a dating of the End. They do indeed relate the End to history – but by compelling every age to watchfulness. They indicate that the time of the End is ever present, for the world never ceases to touch that ‘wholly other’ which, on one occasion, will also put an end to the world as *chronos*. (Ratzinger, p.199)

Moreover, different streams can be found within apocalyptic movements such as premillennialism, which asserts that there will be an earthly kingdom in which Christ and his saints will reign for a millennium before the final judgment. This perspective was rejected by Augustine but is widely embraced in some Evangelical circles. Overall, such sentiments usually envisage an inevitable catastrophe, but Wojcik argues that,

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Peter 5:8.



The Marian apparitional worldview, in contrast, expresses a form of *avertive apocalypticism*, with the emphasis on Mary's role as intercessor who warns and attempts to save humanity, providing the heavenly mandates that will prevent worldly cataclysm, if these are followed by people.<sup>26</sup>

This is not to say that Marian apocalypticism is devoid of any forewarning of chastisements, from wars to famines. However, for Catholics, the future of humanity is not set in stone. It springs from actions performed by human beings endowed with free will and who must then face the very real consequences of their choices. Importantly, this same emphasis on history partially depending on the human person as a self-determining moral agent who is responsible for his or her acts is an intrinsic part of John Paul II's personalist philosophy.

### C) Defining Marian apocalypticism in a Catholic context

Having clarified the basic parameters for understanding Marian apocalypticism within a Catholic context, we must propose a clear definition of this phenomenon. Daniel Wojcik, who has studied Marian apocalypticism both within and without the confines of the Roman Catholic Church, offers this definition:

The apocalyptic prophecies associated with such (Marian) apparitions assert that *Mary is appearing as part of a divine plan unfolding in the last days, with predictions of an imminent eschatological battle between Mary and the forces of evil, identified variously as secularism, modernism, communism, and other perceived threats to the Church.*<sup>27</sup>

We will unpack this somewhat dense definition. Firstly, Marian apocalypticism is based on a belief that in the end times, God will grant this special role to Mary just as he also invited her to play a pivotal role in the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity.

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<sup>26</sup> Wojcik, Daniel. "Marian Apocalypticism," *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, p.649.

<sup>27</sup> Wojcik, Daniel. "Marian Apocalypticism," *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, p.648. Emphasis is mine.

This new mission of Mary in the history of salvation is understood to be unveiled further through her apparitions, and so, considering the multiplication of approved apparitions in our days, proponents of such movements believe indeed that the end of this world is imminent.

Secondly, the Virgin has been seen as a protagonist in the cosmic battle against evil since Antiquity, with Church Fathers already connecting the protoevangelium of Genesis 3 with the figure of Mary. This biblical passage stating radical enmity between the woman – and her offspring – and the devil greatly influenced the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, in 1854. If Mary was not preserved from original sin at conception, then this enmity would be weakened, for she would have been under the dominion of the devil for a time, until God reclaimed her at a later moment in her life.

Thirdly, this notion of Mary as absolutely unspoiled paved the way for thinking of her as the “vanquisher of all heresies;”<sup>28</sup> for if she is so utterly faithful to God, she is also radically opposed to all the enemies of God. This is part of the dynamic which leads contemporary Marian apocalyptic movements to posit Mary against the modern ideologies which the Church rejects: for instance, materialism, secularism, modernism, relativism, communism, and unbridled capitalism.

Consequently, between the theological developments of Catholic Mariology, culminating in the proclamation of two Marian dogmas in the last two centuries, and the approvals granted to modern Marian apparitions and their eschatological messages, many Catholic faithful interpret the modern era as the Marian Age, preluding the end times. As we will soon see, such an attitude is often traced back to Louis de Montfort, who coined

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<sup>28</sup> “Tract from the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary after Septuagesima,” *The Roman Missal of 1962*.

the expression “Age of Mary” in his popular devotional study, *Traité de la vraie dévotion à la Sainte Vierge*.

1) The early history of Marian apparitions

In the Catholic tradition, the first recognized Marian apparition was that of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza, Spain. According to the local legend, the Virgin Mary, who was still alive but living in Jerusalem at the time, appeared to Saint James the Greater, who was struggling to evangelise the Iberian Peninsula. On the site, the Apostle is said to have built the first Spanish church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and it became a focal point of conversion. This motif presenting Mary as spearheading evangelisation and comforting Christian missionaries in times of hardships will be found again and again. However, this purported event presents several issues: first, it is not exactly an apparition but rather a bilocation of the Virgin Mary, who was said to be still alive at the time, second, there are no historical mentions of the apparition of Our Lady of the Pillar until the thirteenth century.<sup>29</sup>

Another Marian apparition from the first century is related in the Bible with the Book of Revelation: a woman, whom the Catholic Church understands to be Mary, appeared to John at Patmos.<sup>30</sup> In the vision, a woman clothed with the sun appears immediately after the Evangelist describes seeing the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple. The woman and her son are caught amidst a great cosmic war involving Satan and Saint Michael the Archangel. This passage is often interpreted in relation to the protoevangelium

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<sup>29</sup> Chiron, Yves. *Enquête sur les apparitions de la Vierge*, p.53.

<sup>30</sup> Revelation 12.

found in Genesis, thus framing the entire biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption with Marian imageries oriented towards a Christocentric perspective.

Furthermore, the historian Yves Chiron argues that the first historical records of a Marian apparition with a public character are found in France, with Our Lady of Le Puy-en-Velay.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, he begins by analysing the reasons behind the veneration of a dolmen in the cathedral of Le Puy as early as the sixth century, when pagan symbols in Gaul were usually razed down or buried. This means, according to Chiron, that the stories mentioning Mary appearing to and healing several women who slept on the stone, must hold some truth despite some discrepancies regarding the name of the bishop of Le Puy at the time. Chiron also believes that it is this narrative, recounting a miraculous snowfall in July on the site where the shrine would come to be erected, which in turn influenced Our Lady of the Snows in Rome.<sup>32</sup>

In the Early Church, many saints are said to have had visions of the Virgin Mary, including Catherine of Alexandria, Martin of Tours, and Monica, the mother of Augustine of Hippo. At that point, most of the apparitions related had saints as their visionaries. However, we already see some apparitional events with poor children, recently converted women, or beggars as recipients of such graces, as will often be the case in modern apparitions. Most of these early apparitions had a private character and so they did not create social movements except in the case of a few, such as Our Lady of Le Puy, which led to the building of chapels and shrines encouraging local pilgrimages.

## 2) Marian apparitions in the Middle Ages

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<sup>31</sup> Chiron, Yves. *Enquête sur les apparitions de la Vierge*, p.51-60.

<sup>32</sup> Chiron, Yves. *Enquête sur les apparitions de la Vierge*, p.57.

During the Middle Ages, we begin to see a growing power of mobilisation with Our Lady of the Rosary entreating Saint Dominic to spread the prayer of the rosary, today a staple of Catholic devotion. Our Lady of Mount Carmel follows a similar pattern: the promotion of a new religious order, here the Carmelites, is tied to a special Marian devotion, the brown scapular given to Simon Stock, which will remain a strong devotional practice throughout history.

Our Lady of Victories is another recurring title given to the Virgin Mary. During agitated times in the Middle Ages, we hear of several accounts of apparitions of Mary bringing about military victories. While often fighting against non-Christians, especially Muslim armies as they rose to power, Christian armies too are sometimes defeated by the Queen of Heaven herself, such as when the British tried to capture the Frankish city of Poitiers in 1202.<sup>33</sup> By the end of the medieval era, the naval battle of Lepanto (1571) imprinted an indelible image of Mary as a fighting figure in the minds of Catholics as she appeared to relieve European nations from an aggressive Ottoman expansion through the prayer of the rosary.

We will not continue to enumerate the hundreds of related Marian events but will content ourselves with concluding that, in medieval times, the emphasis was not so much on messages as on events such as a healing, the transmission of a new devotion, the creation of a religious order, or a military victory. However, we already can perceive a strong militant aspect to Marian apparitions, along with a powerful force of mobilisation able to create movements and devotions persisting across history and continents.

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<sup>33</sup> Chiron, Yves. *Enquête sur les apparitions de la Vierge*, p.95.

### 3) Louis de Montfort: the “turning point”

French Catholicism is profoundly marked by Marian themes and dedicated many of its most beautiful cathedrals and churches to “Notre Dame.” While many saints have promoted Marian devotion throughout France, from Saint Dominic to Sainte Catherine Labouré, one of the striking figures remains Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716), hailed by Pope John Paul II as a master of Marian spirituality and as his very own “turning point” in terms of Marian devotion and Mariology.<sup>34</sup> This vagabond priest from Brittany was influenced by the seventeenth century French school of spirituality and in turn gave the framework for many modern Marian movements. His most famous work, in English *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*, is an accessible entry to Catholic Mariology. The devotional treatise is enriched by poetic language and extensive quotes from the Bible, Church Fathers, seventeenth and eighteenth-century theologians, along with Montfort’s own particular views.

However, it would be misleading to reduce Montfort’s spirituality to the sole figure of Mary. Indeed, his motto as priest was “Dieu seul!” and his theology was deeply Trinitarian and Christocentric,<sup>35</sup> as the young Karol Wojtyla would later discover with enthusiasm. The story goes that, being afraid that his childhood devotion to Mary was getting in the way of proper worship of God as a theologically-informed seminarian, Karol began reading *True Devotion* and came to the realisation that devotion to the Virgin Mary did not impede his faith in God but, on the contrary, perfected it. In his “Letter to the

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<sup>34</sup> André Frossard. *Be not Afraid!*, p.125.

<sup>35</sup> Di Fiores, Stefano. *Jesus Living in Mary*, p.689-690.

Montfort Religious Family,”<sup>36</sup> John Paul II quotes *True Devotion* to expose the main argument provided by Montfort concerning the importance of Marian devotion:

Toute notre perfection consistant à être conformes, unis et consacrés à Jésus-Christ, la plus parfaite de toutes les dévotions est sans difficultés, celle qui nous conforme, unit et consacre le plus parfaitement à Jésus-Christ. Or, Marie étant la plus conforme à Jésus-Christ de toutes les créatures, il s’ensuit que, de toutes les dévotions, celle qui consacre et conforme le plus une âme à Notre-Seigneur est la dévotion à la Très Sainte Vierge, sa sainte Mère, et que plus une âme sera consacrée à Marie, plus elle le sera à Jésus-Christ. (Montfort, §120)<sup>37</sup>

Once elected Pope, he used a line from Montfort’s work as his pontifical motto: “*Totus tuus*,” that is, belonging completely to Christ through Mary.<sup>38</sup> He then explained in an interview: “Thanks to Saint Louis of Montfort, I came to understand that true devotion to the Mother of God is actually Christocentric, indeed, it is very profoundly rooted in the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption.”<sup>39</sup>

According to Montfort, Mary “is the summary of the Church in total harmony with God through Christ Jesus.”<sup>40</sup> She constitutes the archetype of the perfect disciple receiving the gift of participation in the Trinitarian life and responding faithfully to God’s grace. In the mystery of the Incarnation, Mary consents to bearing the Word of God and (as it is argued in the tenth and eleventh centuries by Eastern authors such as John the Geometer and Western ones such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Arnold of Bonneval) in the mystery of

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<sup>36</sup> John Paul II. “Letter to the Montfort Religious Family,” *Vatican*, §4.

<sup>37</sup> In John Paul II’s “Letter to the Montfort Religious Family” §4, the text is translated as follows: “*All our perfection*”, St Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort writes, “*consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ*; and therefore, the most perfect of all devotions is, without any doubt, that which most perfectly conforms, unites and consecrates us to Jesus Christ. Now, Mary being the most conformed of all creatures to Jesus Christ, it follows that, of all devotions, that which most consecrates and conforms the soul to Our Lord is devotion to his holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to Mary, the more it is consecrated to Jesus.” Emphasis is in the text.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II. “Letter to the Montfort Religious Family,” *Vatican*. §1.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II. *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p.212-213.

<sup>40</sup> Di Fiore, Stefano. *Jesus Living in Mary*, p.689.

Redemption she willingly unites her suffering to the sacrifice of her Son on the Cross.<sup>41</sup> She is established at once as full of grace and as Mediatrix of all graces. She therefore becomes Mother of the Church and Queen of all hearts, sharing intimately in the kingship of her Son. While much of Montfort's theology is commonly found in Catholic Mariology, Montfort as a spiritual writer emphasised several unique points. Among the distinctive features of Montfort's Mariology, two especially influenced later developments in Marian movements as well as John Paul II's devotion: the eschatological role of Mary, and Marian consecration.

Scholars usually contend that the "Age of Mary" originates from Montfort's *True Devotion*. In fact, we could even speak of 'Marian eschatology' as Montfort posits Mary, through her relationship to the Trinity, at the center of the cosmic events which will mark the end of this world:

The end times bring the full revelation of Mary, not in a sense of a deeper abstract knowledge, but insofar as we will experience her presence. She will be revealed in her merciful love towards sinners, in her battle against the enemies of God, and in her support of the faithful disciples of Christ." (Di Fiore, p.353; Montfort §49-59)

The Marian Age is a time when Mary prepares the world for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, as she also prepared it for his First Coming in the Incarnation: "C'est par Marie que le salut du monde a commencé, et c'est par Marie qu'il doit être consommé."<sup>42</sup> What this preparation exactly consists of remains unclear although we hear about a "deluge of fire, love and justice" and the renewal of the Church through the reign of Mary in the heart of

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<sup>41</sup> For more information on the origins of the claim of the cooperation of Mary in Christ's redemptive work, see John Paul II. "Udienza generale : Mercoledì, 25 ottobre 1995," *Vatican*.

<sup>42</sup> De Montfort, Louis. *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*, §49. "It is through Mary that the salvation of the world has begun, and it is through Mary that it shall be consumed." Translation is mine.



men and women across the world, brought about by the zealous work of the “apostles of the end times,” another well-known Montfortian expression.<sup>43</sup>

Against diverging interpretations, Stefano di Fiore argues that Montfort, while providing an original eschatology, steers clear of any theory which would break away from Catholic teachings by stating:

On the comings of Jesus, we must adhere strictly to Monfort’s words, which describe only two: the first, and the second or last. Thus, Montfort is adopting the language of the Church, which in its Credo confesses only two comings of Christ: at the time of the Incarnation and at the Last Judgment. Montfort considers each of these a discreet, complex event. In fact, his language is polyvalent: the word “coming” covers distinct events and partially different subject matter. The first coming includes the Incarnation and also the public life and the Cross; the second or last coming includes the spiritual rein, i.e., in the hearts of men and women of today, as well as his personal advent at the Parousia to judge the living and the dead. (Di Fiore, p.359)

Nonetheless, we must take into consideration the fact that Montfort was not a systematic theologian but rather a preaching priest who did not thoroughly envision an entire eschatological model. In a way, the same will be true for John Paul II.

Now regarding consecration, Montfort developed what he called the perfect consecration to Jesus Christ through Mary, inspired by the devotion of holy slavery promoted by Cardinal de Bérulle and his followers Olier and Boudon.<sup>44</sup> What Louis Marie meant by Marian consecration is twofold: it includes both exterior devotions such as praying the rosary and wearing the brown scapular, and an interior state of complete surrender to Jesus through the hands of Mary.<sup>45</sup> The latter devotion is further expanded upon as a perfect renewal of baptismal promises through a total gift of self in body, soul,

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<sup>43</sup> Di Fiore, Stefano. *Jesus Living in Mary*, p.354-356 and De Montfort, Louis. *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*, §58.

<sup>44</sup> Di Fiore, Stefano. *Jesus Living in Mary*, p.206.

<sup>45</sup> De Montfort, Louis. *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*, §116 and §121-122.

exterior and interior goods.<sup>46</sup> “Mary is, then, the privileged entry into a constantly deeper baptismal life in Christ Jesus”<sup>47</sup> which overflows in emptying of self, sweet trust in God, childlike abandonment to Mary, apostolic zeal, and greater charity towards the neighbor. This life lived “through Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary”<sup>48</sup> became the font of inspiration for many modern Marian devotees who in turn developed their own view of consecration.<sup>49</sup> We can mention Maximilian Kolbe who wrote his own act of consecration to Mary Immaculate for his *Militia Immaculata*, but more importantly here, we must think of John Paul II’s many acts of entrustment: of his pontificate, of the world, of the third millennium, to Jesus through Mary. This concept of Marian consecration, emphasised also through apparitions such as Our Lady of Fatima, came to play an intrinsic role in Marian apocalypticism.

Part of the influence of Montfort’s writings on Marian apocalypticism is due to its somewhat sensational character. For instance, the manuscript of *True Devotion*, which for some unknown reason was neither published by Montfort nor by his close successors, was buried in a trunk during the French Revolution and lost in a field for more than a century. It was retrieved in 1842 but it is now recognised that some parts of the book are missing.<sup>50</sup> In the eyes of many faithful, this story gave a sense of legitimacy to one of the passages found in the manuscript:

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<sup>46</sup> De Montfort, Louis. *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*, §120-121. See also Di Fiores, Stefano. *Jesus Living in Mary*, p.210-211.

<sup>47</sup> Di Fiores, Stefano. *Jesus Living in Mary*, p.232.

<sup>48</sup> De Montfort, Louis. *The Secret of Mary*, §28.

<sup>49</sup> For a historical and theological investigation of this aspect of Montfortian Mariology, its origins and its influence on John Paul II, refer to Scherschligt, Michael A. *To Jesus Through Mary: History and Theology*.

<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the manuscript was edited before its publication in 1843 and following editions did not go back to the original text. This was one of the concerns raised by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which impeded the declaration of Louis de Montfort as a Doctor of the Church. For more information, see the work of Bernard Guitteny.

I clearly foresee that raging beasts will come in fury to tear to pieces with their diabolical teeth this little book and the one the Holy Spirit made use of to write it, or they will cause it at least to lie hidden in the darkness and silence of a coffer and so prevent it from seeing the light of day. (Montfort §114; Di Fiores, p.1212-1213)

This narrative provides us with a clear example of how Montfort and many Marian apocalyptic movements after him situate themselves in the midst of spiritual and physical combats, relying also on biblical imagery such as here the ‘treasure buried in a field’ parable. In addition, Montfort’s predictions, dating back from the early eighteenth century, regarding an increasing devotion to Mary and the intensifying sense of her presence have been in some measure validated through the proclamation of two Marian dogmas and the multiplication of Marian apparitions given approval from the Vatican in modern times.

#### 4) Modern Marian apparitions

At the dawn of the modern era, the Catholic Church began to formally approve some apparitions, either as a ratification coming from Rome directly or from the local bishop. This gave such events a more universal influence and entrenched their significance. Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1531 could be considered the first major modern apparition in the history of Marian apparitions. It was the catalyst for the conversion of millions of indigenous Americans and remains until now a symbol of Latin American identity. While Christians struggled to spread the gospel to the New World, Mary’s presence through her apparitions, the shrine built on site, and the tilma with her image, effectively translated the Catholic faith to the local population. From then on, Mary entered the modern area as a widely popular figure.

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, around the time of Louis de Montfort, we can mention a few Marian apparitions with a private character such as the

ones to Mother Agnes de Langeac,<sup>51</sup> who was very influential for Olier,<sup>52</sup> and to other protagonists of the French school of spirituality, such as Madame Acarie<sup>53</sup> or Jeanne Delanoue, who will meet several times with Montfort.<sup>54</sup> However, although Louis de Montfort mentions Mother Agnes in *True Devotion*, along with famous visionaries such as Saint Dominic, the Breton Alain de la Roche and Maria d'Agreda, he rarely focuses on Marian apparitions.<sup>55</sup> Part of this may be attributed to his desire to spread Marian devotion to all souls through faith and not to limit his preaching to a few mystically inclined faithful. Yet, considering that the French school of spirituality heavily influenced Montfort, we should not overlook its numerous ties to Marian apparitional claims, along with the fact that he himself may have received similar apparitions according to some biographers.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, in the same era, we find a few important French apparitions, notably the apparitions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Paray-le-Monial and the Marian apparitions of Our Lady of Laus in the Alps. Arguably, Montfort was just as influenced by the rising apparitional movements of his time as he participated in shaping the Marian apocalyptic tendencies which came after.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, we continue to witness an impressive rise in approved Marian apparitions including, to mention only a few, Rue du Bac (1830), Our Lady of Zion (1842), La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858), Our Lady of Good Help (1859),<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Laurentin, René. "Agnès de Langeac" *Dictionnaire des « apparitions » de la Vierge Marie*, p.67.

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Jacques Olier was the founder of the Sulpicians, where Montfort studied theology for seven years.

<sup>53</sup> Laurentin, René. "Marie de l'Incarnation" *Dictionnaire des « apparitions » de la Vierge Marie*, p.603.

<sup>54</sup> Laurentin, René. "Jeanne Delanoue" *Dictionnaire des « apparitions » de la Vierge Marie*, p.472-473. Interestingly, Jeanne Delanoue will also be mentioned by Mary in an apparition at l'Ile-Bouchard in 1947, see "Sainte Jeanne Delanoue," *L'Ile-Bouchard sanctuaire marial et angélique*.

<sup>55</sup> De Montfort, Louis. *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*, §170, §206, §249.

<sup>56</sup> Laurentin, René. "Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort" *Dictionnaire des « apparitions » de la Vierge Marie*, p.559-560.

<sup>57</sup> This apparition in particular came to be formally approved only much later: in 2010 by Bishop Ricken.

Pontmain (1871), Knock (1879), Fatima (1917), Beauraing (1932), Banneux (1933), Akita (1973), Cuapa (1980), Kibeho (1981)... Among the reasons given for such a proliferation, some sociologists and anthropologists mention the transition to modernity, with all the wars and government or lifestyle changes which it entailed. The range of explanations behind such a multiplication of Marian apparitions will be further exposed in a later section.

Overall, modern apparitions are deeply transnational in scope: North America (Our Lady of Good Help, Wisconsin), Latin America (Our Lady of Cuapa, Nicaragua), Africa (Kibeho, Rwanda), Asia (Akita, Japan) and Europe with all the other previously named. Marian apparitions thus embodied the universal spread of Catholicism on all continents and its inculturation in various contexts. The messages of the apparitions also demonstrated interest in human affairs, warning against the rise of secularism, political upheavals, genocide, communism... An especially clear illustration of what we have said can be found with our Lady of Kibeho in Rwanda.

On November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1981, the young Alphonsine Mumureke sees the “Mother of the Word,” the Virgin Mary. Interestingly, Mary is depicted as a Rwandan girl, and she speaks in the local tongue. A few weeks later, two other girls claim similar apparitions in the same school, and the claims continue to spread to other children and beyond their school, while apparitions to Alphonsine remain ongoing for several years. The investigation is quickly launched and eleven years after the first apparition, Bishop Misago lays the first stone for the chapel of the apparitions. In 1993, the bishop leads the first diocesan pilgrimage to the site, asking for peace in Rwanda. In fact, the apparitions focused on the devotion to the Seven Sorrows of Mary, the Virgin was seen crying, and rivers of blood flowed through the town’s streets according to the visionaries. In 1994, the town of Kibeho, along with the

rest of the country, will witness the Tutsi genocide in which three of the seers will die.<sup>58</sup> These unfortunate circumstances reinforced the legitimacy of the apparitions in the minds of many, including Bishop Misago. Hence, in Our Lady of Kibeho, we see the apparitional Mary as a figure close to the Rwandan people, speaking their language, and concerned with their history and political affairs. She warns them of sorrows to come and gives them prayers to get them through their suffering in union with the Cross.

Other famous devotions promoted in modern Marian apparitions are the miraculous medal, the rosary, the first Saturday devotion, and the scapular. The usual exhortation combines praying for peace in the world and sacrificing yourself for the conversion of sinners. Messages of hope can also be heard for example at Pontmain: “God will soon grant your request. My Son allows himself to be moved”<sup>59</sup> and Fatima: “In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world.”<sup>60</sup> Except in a few such as Our Lady of Knock in Ireland, the emphasis of modern apparitions is often placed on messages granted by the Virgin Mary to the seers. In addition to vocal or written words, symbolic visions are also weaved into what makes up complex Marian apparitional messages. The interpretation of such messages is then commonly shaped by seers in collaboration with the Catholic hierarchy, from a simple priest to the Pope.

##### 5) The spread of Marian apparitional movements in the twentieth century

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<sup>58</sup> Laurentin, René. “Kibeho,” *Dictionnaire des « apparitions » de la Vierge Marie*, p.1163.

<sup>59</sup> Laurentin, René. “Pontmain,” *Dictionnaire des « apparitions » de la Vierge Marie*, p.748. Translation is mine.

<sup>60</sup> Sister Lucia Dos Santos. “The Message of Fatima,” *Vatican*.

One of the main causes for the popularisation of modern Marian apparitions are the numerous Marian apparitional movements which spread worldwide in the twentieth century through the skillful use of new technologies such as the mass-distribution of pamphlets and other types of advertising, the radio and television, and social media. Among them, we can name Maximilian Kolbe's *Militia Immaculata*, Frank Duff's Legion of Mary, the World Apostolate of Fatima (formerly known as the Blue Army and co-founded by Father Colgan and John Haffert), the Fatima Center of the controversial Nicholas Gruner, Father Fox's Fatima Family Apostolate, and the Family Rosary Crusade led by Patrick Peyton. As it is already obvious with the titles of such movements, two components are heavily emphasised: the importance of Fatima among other Marian apparitions, and the militant aspect of the Marian devotion promoted by such groups. While an entire study could be done solely on these Marian apocalyptic movements, we only intend here to present a few as they relate to John Paul II and what he had to say on marriage and the family.

John Paul II and Maximilian Kolbe both sharing a sense of Polish patriotism amidst historical struggles, the Pope often returned to the saint's life (whom he himself beatified as martyr) especially as it concerned his Marian charism and his martyrdom in defense of a father who was crying out for his family.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, we see that the Pope was aware and supportive of the leading role played in evangelisation by many of these movements, especially as they pertained to the sanctification of the laity and of the family, for example through the communal prayer of the rosary. For instance, the Legion of Mary was

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<sup>61</sup> John Paul II. "Omelia di Giovanni Paolo II : Piazza San Pietro, 10 ottobre 1982," *Vatican*.

encountered and encouraged on several occasions by the Pope.<sup>62</sup> Conversely, the World Apostolate of Fatima chose John Paul II as its very own patron saint “because he is to be considered the Pope of Fatima and Protector of our families, (and) given that an important aspect of the WAF mission is the formation of families through the authentic Message of Fatima.”<sup>63</sup> In this way, Marian apocalyptic movements became key actors of John Paul II’s New Evangelization, in which the family could be both object and subject of evangelisation.

#### D) A note on ambivalent, unapproved, or rejected apparitions

While it should now be clear that approved apparitions already constitute a dense material to study, we should mention that unapproved or rejected apparitions also participate in the shaping of Marian apocalypticism. Some relatively more accepted ones such as Medjugorje have been promoted by Catholics and have influenced many believers in their way of praying for instance. Other apparitions found to be much more problematic still emphasise common characteristics of Marian apparitional movements while often taking them to an extreme.

Our Lady of All Nations is a series of contested apparitions in twentieth-century Amsterdam thought by some to prophesy the Cold War, the Second Vatican Council and a fifth Marian dogma.<sup>64</sup> It has been at times approved or rejected by the local bishop and the Vatican. The latest update on the matter was provided in 2020 by the local bishop, Johannes

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<sup>62</sup> John Paul II. “Homily: St. Louis, January 27th, 1999,” and “Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II ai pellegrini del movimento apostolico della ‘Legione di Maria’ : Sabato, 30 ottobre 1982,” *Vatican*.

<sup>63</sup> This statement can be read on the welcome page of the website *World Apostolate of Fatima Canada*.

<sup>64</sup> The four Marian dogmas are: Divine Motherhood, Perpetual Virginity, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. Our Lady of All Nations prophesies that a fifth Marian dogma will come to be defined, that is, Mary as Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate.



Hendricks, in the “Clarification by the Bishop of Haarlem-Amsterdam regarding the Lady of All Nations.” In this text, the neutral/negative judgment<sup>65</sup> (*non constat de supernaturalitate*) of 1974 is reiterated, over-ruling an approval for public veneration granted by one of his predecessors, Henry Bomers.<sup>66</sup> While not relating the entire story, we wish to emphasise several points: one, the Church is very careful in its investigations of such complex phenomena; second, official investigations and local bishops are not infallible and so their judgment can be changed; third, modern Marian apparitions are thus often controversial even within the Catholic world. While some proponents of a Marian apocalyptic worldview hope that specific apparitions which have been ruled against could come to be accepted, other Catholics find even accepted apparitions to be hard to believe for the simple fact that investigations and approvals are not necessarily devoid of error.

This leads us to examine apparitions which are either still under investigation or have been judged with a *non constat* rather than a *constat de non*. Among them, we can mention Garabandal from 1961 to 1965 and Medjugorje, which started in 1981 and continues to this day. Both are highly influential despite not having been approved by the Church. Characteristic of some branches of Marian apocalypticism concerned with an internal ecclesial crisis, Garabandal predicts that many cardinals, bishops, and priests will lead the faithful astray, and that the Eucharist will become less and less respected.<sup>67</sup> Medjugorje is a special case as it remains widely promoted in Catholic circles despite the lack of official endorsement by the Church. Additionally, it counts hundreds of messages,

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<sup>65</sup> For a discussion on the different types of judgments issued by the Church on Marian apparitions refer to the introduction.

<sup>66</sup> Hendricks, Johannes. “Clarification by the Bishop of Haarlem-Amsterdam Regarding the Lady of All Nations,” *Bisdom Haarlem-Amsterdam*. <https://www.bisdomhaarlem-amsterdam.nl/?p=news&id=4486>.

<sup>67</sup> “Four Messages of Our Lady Carmel of Garabandal,” *Garabandal*. [http://www.garabandal.org/News/Message\\_7.shtml](http://www.garabandal.org/News/Message_7.shtml).

including new ones every year, which renders the investigation process exceedingly sensitive and lengthy. The messages, however, tend to follow the template of most modern apparitions: a call for repentance and increased prayer, a renewed attention given to the wellbeing of families, a concern for political events and world peace...

Finally, we come to briefly present a couple of rejected apparitions noted for their content incompatible with the Catholic faith but still catalogued as Marian apocalypticism, though heterodox from a Catholic perspective. Among them, we find the apparitions of Bayside in New York and those of the Army of Mary in Quebec. The messages of Veronica Lueken, the alleged seer of Our Lady in Bayside, are characteristic of apocalypticism pushed to the extreme: detailed prophecies of crises and chastisements overpower feeble notes of eschatological hope, and the alarmist tone leads to numerous polemics.

Regarding the Army of Mary, a sectarian movement started in Quebec as an alternative to the Catholic Legion of Mary, we hear a similar approach to Marian militancy, where Mary is positioned against the Church, believed to be false. Marie-Paul Giguère, the foundress, builds on the apparitions of Our Lady of All Nations, which we have mentioned at the beginning of this section, while also claiming that she is the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary.<sup>68</sup> Over-emphasis on Mary or even Mariolatry, strong attacks against the Church, highly specific or exceedingly political prophecies, and the promotion of doctrines incompatible with the Catholic faith, such as reincarnation, can be found in rejected apparitions.

Furthermore, it is important to notice that when apparitional messages become overly precise in their depiction of potential earthly events, they are often rejected by the

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<sup>68</sup> Hargett, Malea. "What Is the Army of Mary? What Do They Believe?" *Cult Education Institute*.

Church which, following the biblical tradition, prefers prophecies shrouded in symbols and interpreted with a more spiritual meaning. G.B. Caird explains the prophetic and eschatological language used in Scriptures in this way:

The prophets looked to the future with bifocal vision. With their near sight they foresaw imminent historical events which would be brought about by familiar human causes; for example, disaster was near for Babylon because Yahweh was stirring up the Medes against them (Isa. 13:17). With their long sight they saw the day of the Lord; and it was in the nature of the prophetic experience that they were able to adjust their focus so as to impose the one image on the other and produce a synthetic picture. Yet they did not thereby lose the ability to distinguish between the two types of vision, any more than the writer of Ps. 23 lost the ability to distinguish between himself and a sheep. (Caird, p.258)

This nuanced attitude can be seen, for instance, in the theological commentary by Ratzinger on the secret of Fatima.<sup>69</sup> While this section does not aim at providing an exhaustive list of contested or rejected apparitions, it seeks to give an idea of what *Catholic* Marian apocalypticism *is not* by providing an overview of marginal movements. It is also an insight into the highly controversial nature of many Marian apparitions – whether they be accepted or rejected – with which the Church has to negotiate.

#### E) Reasons behind multiplication and mobilisation

Scholars have proposed several theories regarding the reasons behind the exponential multiplication of Marian apparitions and their impressive capacity for mobilising millions of devotees across very different cultures. According to Paolo Apolito, the religious fundamentalism of the United States may have normalised miraculous claims. In addition, he also investigated the Internet and social networks as favorizing the spread of such phenomena.<sup>70</sup> While his first claim may be revised when looking at the rest of the

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<sup>69</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “The Message of Fatima,” *Vatican*.

<sup>70</sup> Apolito, Paolo. *The Internet and the Madonna*, p.34.

world, his argument regarding the role of technology and globalisation is undeniable. Most Marian apparitional movements are very present online and have mastered the use of new technologies. Robert Orsi, reacting to the work of experts such as David Blackbourn, William Christian, Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, and Peter Margry, summarises his claim by stating that Marian apparitions constitute an “alternative modernity.” By that, he means to point to Marian apparitional movements as a way of navigating modernity, its hopes, disappointments, struggles, and means, while operating beyond its confines.<sup>71</sup> For Ruth Harris and others such as Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, there is also a part of psychological, albeit unconscious motives, at play in contexts particularly marked with political, social, and personal crises. In that same vein, we may point to psychoanalytical works on Marian apparitions, for instance those of Valeria Cespedes Musso. For Catholic theologians such as John Paul II, Josef Ratzinger, Stefano Di Fiores, René Laurentin, and Théodore Koehler, the rise of Marian apparitions and their mobilising power also find a spiritual meaning: as the history of humanity unfolds and comes closer to an end, God sends his mother to prepare, protect, guide, warn, correct, and encourage the faithful who are in dire need of such a maternal presence. For them, the multiplication of Marian apparitions is indeed proof that now is the “Age of Mary.”

#### F) Conclusion: the Fatima template

To conclude, we turn once more to the Portuguese apparitions of Fatima as an archetype of most modern Marian apparitions.<sup>72</sup> This series of apparitions, every thirteenth of the month from May to October 1917, was witnessed by three young shepherds: Lucia,

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<sup>71</sup> Orsi, Robert. “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” *Historically Speaking*.

<sup>72</sup> Maunder, Chris. *Our Lady of the Nations: Apparitions of Mary in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic Europe*, p.22.

Francisco, and Jacinta. They reported seeing a lady dressed in white who asked them to pray the rosary daily for the end of the war. Through the course of the months, the apparitions became known to all the villagers and around, leading to much controversy and a gathering of thousands for the last apparition, where many witnessed a miraculous phenomenon of the sun moving and changing colors. In July, Mary told the children:

I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world. (The Message of Fatima)

Indeed, this statement of the Virgin Mary to the seers of Fatima is quite representative of Marian apocalypticism for multiple reasons: we find here an approved private revelation prophesising at once human and spiritual events happening on a global scale and potentially avoided through special devotions such as consecration. The apocalyptic tone is read throughout with warnings of possible catastrophes such as the annihilation of various nations. Some of these predictions were understood as being validated through the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the assassination attempt of John Paul II in 1981, the Consecration of the World to Mary by that same Pope in 1984, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, thus reinforcing the faith of many in such apparitions. Finally, the Age of Mary as understood by Montfort is prefigured by the victory of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin and a period of peace granted to the world.

Fatima is therefore at once a very influential template through which to look at different modern Marian apparitions while also being particularly dear to Pope John Paul II, who attributed his survival after being shot to her prayers, and who appointed Our Lady

of Fatima as patroness of his newly created Pontifical Institute for the Studies on Marriage and Family. Having now begun presenting Marian apocalypticism, its promoters, patterns, and worldviews, we will elaborate in our next chapter on the shape of John Paul II's own Marian apocalypticism as it relates to his Marian devotion and personalist background.

### III) John Paul II's personalist and Marian background

John Paul II was called the Marian Pope for many reasons: he always visited Marian shrines when he embarked on his numerous trips, he wrote and spoke much about Mary, and he also proposed both a Marian Year (the second only in history) and a new set of mysteries for the rosary (for the first time since Dominic's Marian apparitions almost 600 years before).<sup>73</sup> As an individual and a thinker who was thoroughly Marian, he turned to Mary as a person, a mother, an example of both consecrated and married life and a typological figure of the Church. Considering his rich understanding of who Mary is, he could turn to her always, grounding all his decisions and actions in her as the perfect disciple of Christ.<sup>74</sup> Thus, his Marian background is twofold: on the one hand, he was very early on steeped in traditional devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and on the other hand, his later thinking about Mary was deeply influenced by his philosophy, from phenomenology to personalism, and his theology concerning the Church, the last times, or human flourishing. This twofold framework of John Paul II's Marian life is what will be studied in this chapter, starting with the devotional aspect and leading onto the more philosophical and theological developments.

#### A) Mapping Wojtyla's devotion: the Marian geography of Poland

As we have seen earlier, in Catholicism, a special attention is given to the particulars of history, for Christianity professes belief in an infinite God who entered our finite world.

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<sup>73</sup> The rosary – which is a form of prayer accompanied by beads so as to count the number of repetitions of the “Hail Mary” prayer - used to include three sets of five mysteries or meditations: the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries. In his encyclical on the rosary named *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, John Paul II proposed a new set of five mysteries for the meditation of the faithful: the luminous mysteries.

<sup>74</sup> De Montfort, Louis. *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*, §120 and John Paul II. “Letter to the Montfort Religious Family,” *Vatican*. §1.

In the same way that time is transfigured through this encounter, space also finds a new meaning. This renewed significance of specific periods and places for Christians is especially embodied by Marian apparitions. As Orsi puts it: “*Here, the transcendent broke into time.*”<sup>75</sup> In his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, John Paul II develops the idea of “a specific ‘geography’ of faith and Marian devotion.”<sup>76</sup> Following his emphasis on sanctuaries in shaping both devotion and history, we will begin this chapter by mapping out the main sites of Marian pilgrimages in Poland at the time of his own upbringing. According to Edward D. O’Connor in “The Roots of Pope John Paul II’s Devotion to Mary,” two Polish locations have played a major role in Wojtyla’s Marian devotion: Czestochowa and Kalwaria Zebrzydowska.

#### 1) Our Lady of Czestochowa, Jasna Gora

First, it would be impossible to understand the Marian landscape of Wojtyla’s Poland without mentioning Our Lady of Czestochowa, the icon of Mary holding the Child Jesus. This painting is called miraculous by Polish faithful for several reasons: the earliest legends surrounding it claim that it was made by Saint Luke the Evangelist,<sup>77</sup> and many miracles are attributed to its copy preserved in Jasna Gora.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, it has been linked to the protection of Poland on several accounts, eventually leading to Mary being crowned

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<sup>75</sup> Orsi, Robert. “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” *Historically Speaking*, p.12. Emphasis is in the text.

<sup>76</sup> John Paul II. “*Redemptoris Mater*,” *Vatican*, §28. For a further discussion on the theological implications of Marian shrines see The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. “The Shrine: Memory, Presence and Prophecy of the Living God.” *Vatican*.

<sup>77</sup> Niedzwiedz, Anna. *The Image and the Figure: Our Lady of Czestochowa in Polish Culture and Popular Religion*, p.11.

<sup>78</sup> Laurentin, René. “Czestochowa,” *Dictionnaire des « apparitions » de la Vierge Marie*, p.220-221.



Queen of Poland by King Jan Kazimierz in 1656.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the involvement of this Marian image in battle is eloquently displayed by the scars it came to bear, simultaneously reminding Polish Catholics that their history can be a participation in the suffering of Mary and Jesus and, conversely, that Jesus and Mary are united with the Polish people in their struggles. Indeed, on the icon, the right side of the face of Mary is crossed by two thick lines, and although the origins of such scars are debated by scholars, the popular legends have turned the wounded image into a national symbol of sacrifice and resilience.<sup>80</sup> Wojtyla himself, who visited the shrine several times, both before and after becoming Pope, underlines the importance of Our Lady of Czestochowa during his first apostolic journey back to his motherland:

Jasna Gora is, in fact, not only a place of pilgrimage for the Poles of the motherland and of the whole world but also *the nation's shrine*. One must listen in this holy place in order to hear the beating of the heart of the nation in the heart of the Mother. For her heart beats, we know, together with all the appointments of history, with all the happenings in our national life: how many times, in fact, has it vibrated with the laments of the historical sufferings of Poland, but also with the shouts of joy and victory! The history of Poland can be written in different ways; especially in the case of the history of the last centuries, it can be interpreted along different lines. But if we want to know how this history is interpreted by the heart of the Poles, we must come here, we must listen to this shrine, we must hear the echo of the life of the whole nation in the heart of its Mother and Queen. And if her heart beats with a tone of disquiet, if it echoes with solicitude and the cry for the conversion and strengthening of consciences, this invitation must be accepted. It is an invitation springing from maternal love, which in its own way is shaping the historical processes in the land of Poland. (John Paul II, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1979, §3)<sup>81</sup>

Importantly, we see that John Paul II, along with many other Poles, clearly attributes to Mary, “Mother and Queen,” a crucial role in shaping the history of his nation. Again, this

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<sup>79</sup> Niedzwiedz, Anna. *The Image and the Figure: Our Lady of Czestochowa in Polish Culture and Popular Religion*, p.105.

<sup>80</sup> For a fuller discussion on this aspect of devotion to Our Lady of Czestochowa, please refer to “Chapter II: The Wounded Image” in Niedzwiedz, Anna. *The Image and the Figure: Our Lady of Czestochowa in Polish Culture and Popular Religion*, pp.49-88.

<sup>81</sup> Emphasis is in the text.

attitude towards Mary as a living agent of both human and salvation history is central to Marian apocalypticism. Evidently, this view became especially influential in the twentieth century with the rise of communism and the concomitance of the message of Fatima. As a Pole who experienced life under communism while also relating to the message of Fatima at an existential level after his assassination attempt, John Paul II easily adhered to this worldview.

## 2) Kalwaria Zebrzydowska

Continuing our discussion of Polish Marian devotion in the context of Wojtyla's background, we must mention a second great site of pilgrimage, that is, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. This shrine was located on the road between Wadowice, Wojtyla's hometown, and Krakow, of which he would later become Archbishop. It was built in the seventeenth century as a model of Calvary, including "forty-five chapels, twenty-four constituting the 'Path of Our Lord' and twenty-one marking the 'Path of Our Lady.' Ten chapels common to both 'paths' symbolized the intertwined lives of Jesus and Mary." This layout perfectly illustrates what will be found later in John Paul II's Marian devotion: a "Christ-centered Marian piety."<sup>82</sup> Likewise, another aspect of this devotion which should not be disregarded is the participation of Mary in the suffering, literally in the *via dolorosa*, of Jesus, as an act also of participation in his redemptive work. John Paul II, in his apostolic letter on suffering entitled *Salvifici doloris*, emphasizes this common Catholic conception that suffering bears a salvific meaning. From visiting the shrine with his father soon after his mother's death,<sup>83</sup> to praying during several spiritual retreats the 'little ways' of Jesus

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<sup>82</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.26.

<sup>83</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.31.

and Mary,<sup>84</sup> or for finding respite in his struggle against communism, there is no doubt that Kalwaria Zebrzydowska held a privileged place in Wojtyla's devotional life.<sup>85</sup> This accent on the suffering Mary, or as she is often called, Our Lady of Sorrows, constitutes another intrinsic part of Marian apocalypticism, which considers that Mary's compassion, literally her "suffering with," urges her to appear to her children, warning and protecting the Church in the midst of painful struggles such as genocide and wars.

## B) Karol Wojtyla's own Marian devotion

### 1) The importance of the family

Karol Wojtyla, being born into a practicing Catholic family, was introduced very early on to several forms of Marian devotions, some of them, as we have just seen, national staples. Beyond pilgrimages, we must mention the importance of Wojtyla's father, for his mother had died when he was only nine years old, thus leaving him with only few memories. John Paul II, in *Gift and Mystery*, described his father as a man "of constant prayer."<sup>86</sup> According to Weigel, "father and son read the Bible together and prayed the rosary regularly," but even more than that, the elder Wojtyla gave his son "the idea that the life of faith has first to do with interior conversion."<sup>87</sup> From this testimony, we can gather that already during childhood, Wojtyla's external acts of piety, such as the rosary (arguably the most popular form of Marian devotion in the Church), were accompanied with a deeper sense of inner devotion. This may have ensured his later promotion of such mainstream

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<sup>84</sup> John Paul II. *In God's Hands: The Spiritual Diaries 1962-2003*, p.12, 37, 75, 86, 105, 117, 124.

<sup>85</sup> John Paul II. *Gift and Mystery*, p.24.

<sup>86</sup> John Paul II. *Gift and Mystery*, p.15-16.

<sup>87</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.30.

devotions, as he did not regard them as empty pietistic gestures devoid of theological and spiritual bearings but as meaningful tools on the journey of faith.

In 2020, the beatification cause of Emilia and Karol Wojtyla Sr. was officially opened by Msgr. Slawomir Oder, also the former postulator of the cause for beatification of John Paul II. The long investigation process led to the recovery of many testimonies concerning John Paul II's parents and the kind of upbringing they gave him. This provides precious insights about the lesser-known Emilia who, while pregnant with the young Karol, was advised by the doctor to have recourse to an abortion due to her weak condition and who, instead, entrusted herself to the Virgin Mary. As she was giving birth in the Marian month of May, she apparently asked for the windows to be opened as Marian songs could be heard from afar, saying: "I want the first thing my child hears to be a hymn to Our Lady."<sup>88</sup> According to Cardinal Dziwisz, who was Wojtyla's secretary during his years as the Archbishop of Krakow:

The Holy Father John Paul II, speaking of his birth, recalled the date and the evening hour when the traditional Marian service is celebrated in May in every Polish church. It is an ancient tradition, often accompanied by the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. ... John Paul II recalled several times what he had been told: his midwife, at the moment of birth, had opened the window of the room where Emilia was giving birth. From there the litany of the Mother of God could be heard in the room: during the celebrations in May, the most important moment is precisely the Litany of Loreto. (Lucchetti)

After the death of Emilia, the elder Karol allegedly consecrated his son to Our Lady of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, telling him: "From today, on, she will be your mother." This, of course, was only the natural continuation of what the devout couple had begun transmitting

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<sup>88</sup> Lucchetti, Silvia. "Wojtyla's father entrusted Karol to Our Lady: 'From today on she will be your mother,'" *Aleteia* from an article in *Marian con te*.

to their son, by praying the rosary together every evening for example: a traditional devotion to Mary which calls for deeper personal and communal conversion daily.

## 2) Jan Tyranowski and Carmelite spirituality

While Wojtyla's parents, and especially his widowed father, were a significant model for their son's spiritual formation, something the Pope would later recall as his "*first seminary*,"<sup>89</sup> another father figure came to play a decisive role in the life of the young Karol: Jan Tyranowski. This lay man, immersed in Carmelite spirituality, formed a group addressed to young men: the Living Rosary.<sup>90</sup> Karol was one of the small group leaders, at once learning how to direct other young men in the faith through Marian devotion – again, primarily the rosary – while at the same time being himself advised by Jan in spiritual matters. The extent of the influence of Jan can be partially assessed through Wojtyla's continued interest in Carmelite spirituality: he wore the brown scapular from age ten up until his death, he almost joined a Carmelite monastery before deciding to enter the seminary, and he later wrote his dissertation on John of the Cross, the great Carmelite Doctor, at once a poet and a theologian, somewhat like Wojtyla himself.<sup>91</sup> In our section on medieval Marian apparitions, we have mentioned some of the numerous connections between the Carmelite order, the rosary, the brown scapular, and Marian apparitions. This shows that Wojtyla, just like so many other Catholics, was raised in a devotional context where Marian apparitions and interventions in history were simply part and parcel of the Christian life and daily devotional culture. This omnipresence of Marian apparitions may

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<sup>89</sup> John Paul II. *Gift and Mystery*, p.16. Emphasis is in the text.

<sup>90</sup> This group is not to be confused with another movement of the same name created in France in the nineteenth century by Pauline Jaricot.

<sup>91</sup> John Paul II. *Faith according to St. John of the Cross*.

explain an apparent lack of self-awareness: why would someone be surprised at the influence of Marian apparitional worldviews in the Church when these movements seem to be an intrinsic part of the Christian life already? In a way, their long-standing influence has enabled them to go often unnoticed, to be accepted by all although mostly unconsciously, to be defended and yet not usually mentioned explicitly.

Again, in his autobiography, John Paul II mentions what he calls the “Marian Thread” of his life.<sup>92</sup> He relates his parish traditions, such as the daily visit to a side chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help with his classmates, the widespread use of the brown scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, due to the presence of a nearby Carmelite monastery, coming eventually to his encounter with Louis de Montfort as a young mine worker. Between Tyranowski’s influence and his discovery of Montfortian spirituality, John Paul II summarizes thus the change that came about: “I was already convinced that *Mary leads us to Christ*, but at that time I began to realize also that *Christ leads us to his Mother*.”<sup>93</sup> Through this new perspective, Wojtyla dived into the deeper meaning of Marian devotions he had been accustomed to, such as the “Hours of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary” or Polish folksongs. Thus, while initially Marian piety had shaped his spirituality without real awareness on his part, as he began to mature as a thinker, his theology came to play a major role in his conscious reception of Marian devotions.

### 3) Leading a Marian life: Louis de Montfort and Maximilian Kolbe as models

As we have already noted, John Paul II’s Marian devotion is clearly indebted to the spirituality and life of Louis de Montfort. In *True Devotion*, Wojtyla found the answers to

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<sup>92</sup> John Paul II. *Gift and Mystery*, p.21-24.

<sup>93</sup> John Paul II. *Gift and Mystery*, p.22. Emphasis is in the text.

his questions pertaining to Marian devotion in relation to the radical primacy of Christ. In his letter “To the Montfort Religious Family,” he explains what struck him, namely that Mary always comes with her Son:

Mary's total relativity to Christ and through him, to the Blessed Trinity, is first experienced in the observation: “You never think of Mary without Mary interceding for you with God. You never praise or honour Mary without Mary's praising and honouring God with you. Mary is altogether relative to God; and indeed, I might well call her *the relation to God*. She only exists with reference to God. She is *the echo of God* that says nothing, repeats nothing, but God. If you say ‘Mary,’ she says ‘God.’ St Elizabeth praised Mary and called her blessed because she had believed. Mary, the faithful echo of God, at once intoned: ‘*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*,’ ‘My soul magnifies the Lord’ (Lk 1: 46). What Mary did then, she does daily now. When we praise her, love her, honour her or give anything to her, it is God who is praised, God who is loved, God who is glorified, and it is to God that we give, through Mary and in Mary” (cf. *Treatise on True Devotion*, n. 225). (John Paul II, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2003, §3)<sup>94</sup>

In Louis de Montfort, Wojtyla could recognize a fellow priest and poet inflamed with the love of God and deeply aware of living a life consecrated to Mary, with Mary, and through Mary who is “the relation to God.”

Additionally, Wojtyla found inspiration for his project of new evangelization in this pastor who, walking ceaselessly throughout Brittany, desired to preach especially to the working-class lay men and women of his time. In his “Message to the Montfortian Religious Family on the Celebrations of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canonization of Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort,” John Paul II calls Montfort “a Gospel wayfarer inflamed by the love of Jesus and of his holy Mother.” He also notes that:

Now that the need for a new evangelization has become imperative in most parts of the world, Fr de Montfort's zeal for the Word of God, his solicitude for the very poor, his ability to make himself understood by the simplest folk and to stimulate their piety, his qualities for organizing, his initiatives to sustain fervour by founding spiritual movements and to involve the laity in the service of the poor, all that, with

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<sup>94</sup> Emphasis is in the text.

practical adaptations, can inspire the apostles of today. (John Paul II, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1997, §5)

With Montfort, Wojtyla could learn how to relate to Mary combining both his devotional upbringing and his theological formation, while also finding the words and ways to share that wisdom with all kinds of people.

However, other saints also participated in the shaping of John Paul II's Marian spirituality, especially his fellow countryman Maximilian Mary Kolbe. The latter was a Franciscan friar who, in 1917, began building a great Marian movement, the *Militia Immaculata*, starting with the City of the Immaculata or *Niepokalanow*, which became the biggest monastery in the world with about 700 monks, and spread with foundations even in Nagasaki. This movement had a definite Marian apocalyptic character according to the definition we have used in this work: it was intended to fight against enemies of the Church, specifically Freemasons, it made use of the latest technological means to spread its message, becoming the largest Catholic press of Poland at the time, and it was closely linked to influential apparitions and their devotions – namely, the apparitions of Rue du Bac and its miraculous medal, and Lourdes and its emphasis on penance, praying the rosary, and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>95</sup> Contrary to what some scholars have claimed concerning Marian apocalypticism belonging to 'popular religion,' we find in Maximilian Kolbe a great synthesis between popular Marian devotions (such as the rosary and the miraculous medal), an influential missionary movement (claiming three million members worldwide), and highly innovative theology (see Manteau-Bonamy's exposition of Kolbe's understanding of Mary as not only immaculately conceived but as

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<sup>95</sup> "About St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe." *National Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe at Marytown*.



the Immaculate Conception in relation to the Holy Spirit).<sup>96</sup> This bridging of popular devotion, evangelical zeal, and theological creativity will also be observed in John Paul II.

John Paul II mentions Maximilian Kolbe in many of his writings, especially his more personal ones, such as his spiritual diaries, his autobiography and his interviews. For instance, linking the Marian example of holiness of Maximilian Kolbe to his own ministry, he wonders: “What would have happened if Mary had said ‘no’? What would have happened if Fr Maksymilian had said ‘no’? (...) Sacrifice is the implication of faith (...) – only through this kind of faith can we become Mary’s assistants, like Fr Kolbe. Such faith reaches prophetic dimensions. Is this the answer of faith that I give to God every day, together with Mary?” or “The Mother of God is the Mother of brave confession. Evidence: Fr Kolbe.”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, it was John Paul II himself who declared Maximilian Kolbe both a saint and a martyr, as he was murdered by Nazi soldiers in Auschwitz while sacrificing himself for the sake of a father, crying out for his family. During his homily for the canonization of Maximilian Kolbe, the Pope stated that: “Padre Kolbe ne ha rivendicato il diritto alla vita, dichiarando la disponibilità di andare alla morte al suo posto, perché era un padre di famiglia e la sua vita era necessaria ai suoi cari.”<sup>98</sup> This interesting anecdote again brings us back to the implications of Marian apocalypticism for the defense of marriage and the family. In apocalyptic times such as those of the Nazi death camps, where evil revealed its face quite openly, there are, as Montfort called them, ‘apostles of Mary,’ who, by following the example of the Mother of God, give their life for the defense of life,

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<sup>96</sup> Manteau-Bonamy, Henri. *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit: The Marian Teaching of St. Maximilian Kolbe*.

<sup>97</sup> John Paul II. *In God’s Hands: The Spiritual Diaries 1962-2003*, p.97-8.

<sup>98</sup> “Father Kolbe did not claim the right to life, he declared his availability to meet his death in his (Franciszek Gajowniczek) place, because he was the father of a family and that his life was necessary to his relatives.” Translation is mine.

which springs forth from the heart of the family. The fact that John Paul II specifically desired to canonize Fr. Kolbe as a martyr emphasizes his recognition of the death of Kolbe not only as a mere atrocity among others performed at Auschwitz, but as a testimony in favor of the dignity of life and the family in times when these values were greatly attacked.

#### 4) Experiencing Marian consecration

Finally, stemming from all the components highlighted above, especially the Marian devotions promoted by Louis de Montfort and Maximilian Kolbe, the spirituality of John Paul II was always marked by a strong emphasis on entrustment and consecration to Mary, or as it used to be termed in the past, “servitude.” While Wojtyla lived through several predecessors pronouncing acts of consecration of the world to Mary in Rome, he also witnessed them closer to home. For example, in the same year as his priestly ordination, “before the Virgin of Czestochowa there was pronounced the consecration of Poland to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on 8 September 1946,” and twenty years later, “the Primate of Poland pronounced the act of total servitude to the Mother of God for the freedom of the Church in Poland and throughout the world.”<sup>99</sup> As John Paul II later explained, simultaneously exposing his personalistic understanding of Marian consecration,

The act speaks of "servitude". It contains a paradox similar to the words of the Gospel according to which one must lose one's life to find it (cf. Mt 10:39). For love constitutes the fulfilment of freedom, yet at the same time "belonging", and so not being free is part of its essence. However, this "not being free" in love is not felt as slavery but rather as an affirmation and fulfilment of freedom. The act of consecration in slavery indicates therefore a unique dependence and a limitless trust. In this sense slavery (non-freedom) expresses the fullness of freedom, in the

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<sup>99</sup> John Paul II. “Holy Mass and Act of Consecration to the Mother of God at Jasna Gora,” *Vatican*, §3.

same way as the Gospel speaks of the need to lose one's life in order to find it in its fullness. (John Paul II, 4 June 1979, §3)

Hence, following Montfort and Kolbe, John Paul II expresses his vision of Marian consecration as going much further than a simple treaty renewed once a year or so. For him, consecration became a way of life, entrusting to Mary all things from the smallest to the most important, and relying on her for all sorts of difficulties as demonstrated by the variety of issues entrusted to her in his many acts of entrustment. For instance, John Paul II will later entrust his various initiatives and writings such as on the struggle against communism, the crisis of morality, the dignity of human life, the role of reason in faith, the importance of the family, or the new millennium to Mary, the mother in whose womb the faithful find the fulfilment of all that they desire. *Totus tuus* could not simply stay a heraldic motto for Wojtyla but it was to become a program for his life and pontificate. In John Paul II's phenomenological framework, Marian consecration is a real life-changing experience, an event which must be actualized.

##### 5) The influence of Vatican II: Mary and the Church

The Second Vatican Council had a profound impact on Wojtyla and more specifically on his Mariology. For instance, while speaking of Louis de Montfort in 2003, he provides a reading of this saint's work through the lens of the council and its Mariological propositions, as outlined in *Lumen gentium*.<sup>100</sup> In fact, soon after his ordination as bishop, Wojtyla was invited to Rome to participate in the Second Vatican Council.

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<sup>100</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to the Montfortian Religious Family," *Vatican*.

During the drafting of *Lumen gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the Church, Wojtyla was involved in the voting process deciding on the location of the section on Mary. Although he argued for placing this section at the beginning of the text, it was later decided that it would become Chapter VIII, situated at the end of the declaration. Indeed, Wojtyla desired to stress the soteriological role of Mary as model of the redemptive mission of the Church stemming from the Crucifixion of Jesus. Thus, it seemed to him that Mary would be best covered in between Christ and the Church, although he accepted the eventual decision to do otherwise.<sup>101</sup> A few decades after the council, during his Marian catechesis, the now Pope reaffirmed the profound value of the renewal of Mariology enabled by Vatican II: “For the first time, the conciliar magisterium offered the Church a doctrinal exposition of Mary’s role in Christ’s redemptive work and in the life of the Church. Thus, we must consider the Council Fathers’ choice, which proved very fruitful for later doctrinal work, to have been a truly providential decision.”<sup>102</sup>

The impact of Vatican II and its propositions in terms of Mariology were further assimilated and expressed by Pope John Paul II in his numerous speeches, and even more so in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, where *Lumen gentium* was quoted over 90 times. At the beginning of his pontificate, during the general audience of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1979, he already declared that “the eighth chapter of the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* is in a certain sense a ‘Magna Charta’ of Mariology for our time.” However, for the future Pope, this Magna Charta was not different in substance to what he had absorbed with Montfort and Kolbe: “Everything *through Mary*. This is the authentic interpretation of the presence

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<sup>101</sup> Jelly, Frederick M. “The Theological Context of and Introduction to Chapter 8 of *Lumen gentium*,” *Marian Studies*.

<sup>102</sup> John Paul II. “The Council’s Teaching on Mary Is Rich and Positive,” *Theotokos: Woman, Mother, Disciple*.

of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, as is proclaimed by Chapter VIII of the Constitution *Lumen gentium*. This interpretation corresponds to the tradition of the saints, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Grignon de Monfort and Maximilian Kolbe.”<sup>103</sup>

More specifically, John Paul II retained from the council the key elements of the Marian dimension of the Church in her pilgrimage of faith and the importance of Mary’s active consent and maternal mediation. Consequently, the Pope opened his Marian encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* with the words of *Lumen gentium*:

Strengthened by the presence of Christ, the Church journeys through time towards the consummation of the ages and goes to meet the Lord who comes. But on this journey – and I wish to make this point straightaway – she proceeds along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary, who ‘advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross.’ (John Paul II, §2)

In this small quote we find all the elements forming John Paul II’s Mariological background, namely that Mary is an archetype of the Church as the Virgin-Mother who follows her Son until the end, participating in his sacrifice through the faithful actualization of her *fiat*. This same quote hints at the fact that the Mariology of John Paul II is also deeply eschatological, although that is something less often remarked, and which we shall begin to discuss now before studying its original manifestations in our third chapter.

### C) Particularities of John Paul II’s evolving Mariology

#### 1) Our Lady of the New Millennium: an eschatological approach to Mary

John Paul II has often highlighted the special relationship of the “Woman” to history and eschatology, using on many occasions the biblical expression of the “fullness of

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<sup>103</sup> John Paul II. “Homily and Act of Consecration to the Mother of God at Jasna Gora,” *Vatican*.

time.”<sup>104</sup> This approach to Mariology which consists in positing Mary as an eschatological figure of the Church and of the human person can be seen already in *Lumen gentium*. Indeed, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church speaks of Mary right after its chapter on “The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and its Union with the Church in Heaven.” As Austin Vaughan noted in his presentation “Mary – Dawn of the Redemption,”

The re-emphasis on eschatology in this post-conciliar period, the insistence that salvation be understood as eternal life with Christ and not simply as a transformation of things here in this day, the reaffirmation of the Church’s teachings on death and judgment and the ties between those in this life and those in the next are all firmly in place in *Lumen gentium*, and I don’t believe Chapter 7 would have come to carry such weight had there not been a Chapter 8. (Vaughan, p.66-67)

For Vaughan, Mariology reinforces eschatological teachings and vice versa. This interaction between the two theological fields came to bear much weight in the thought of John Paul II.

John Paul II, heavily influenced by the Second Vatican Council, used the “fullness of time” as a framework for doing Mariology. Consequently, his pontificate and his Marian thinking are deeply marked by an eschatological language and overall direction. In our third chapter we will see how this interacts with his “new feminism” and the fight against the “culture of death.” By way of illustration, in his apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, John Paul II writes that “preparing for the year 2000 has become as it were a hermeneutical key” to understand his pontificate.<sup>105</sup> James McCurry, in “Mary and the Millenium: Woman, Son, and Fullness of Time,” summarizes thus:

‘Fullness of time’ is the underlying assumption that serves as the golden thread linking the thoughts of Pope John Paul in both *Redemptoris Mater* and *Tertio millennio adveniente*. In fact, the ‘fullness of time’ theme not only links the two documents, but also ties both to the Scriptures, the Second Vatican Council, and the

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<sup>104</sup> Galatians 4:4. See also Paul VI. “*Lumen gentium*,” *Vatican*, §52 and John Paul II. “*Redemptoris Mater*” §1, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*” §1, “*Novo millennio ineunte*” §5.

<sup>105</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*,” *Vatican*, §23.

continuum of Pope John Paul II's writings on the bimillennium throughout his pontificate. (McCurry, p.106)

The fullness of time that is the Incarnation happened first and foremost in Mary and through Mary's consent, thus placing her at the heart of eschatological interrogations, which, in Christianity, are fundamentally Christocentric. Additionally, the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, defined in the past two centuries, have further inscribed Mary in eschatology. She is preserved from original sin, representing the initial intent of God when creating human beings for holiness, and assumed into heaven, completely taken into the divine life of the Trinity. In this way, she is the eschatological representation of the personal human soul as well as of the Church in its entirety. John Paul II, during the mass of the Assumption at Lourdes in 1983, summarizes: "Marie est la première des rachetés. En elle aussi, a déjà commence la transformation de l'histoire du cosmos en Règne de Dieu."<sup>106</sup> In *Redemptoris Mater*, he also states that:

It is a question not only of recalling that Mary 'preceded' the entry of Christ the Lord into the history of the human family, but also of emphasizing, in the light of Mary, that from the moment when the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished, human history entered 'the fullness of time,' and that the Church is the sign of this fullness. (John Paul II, 1987, §49)

This connection between Mary and eschatology also leads back to the emphasis on pilgrimages: Mary is the figure of the disciple who has embarked on the pilgrimage of faith and has reached the final destination. In her footsteps walk countless souls and the entire Church, for whom the Marian shrine is both destination and shelter, where they can find the strength to continue walking on the greater pilgrimage that is life. Marian sanctuaries thus become bastions in a world and in a Church where eschatology is sometimes forgotten.

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<sup>106</sup> John Paul II, "Homélie du Pape Jean Paul II, 15 août 1983," *Vatican*, §5. "Mary is the first of the redeemed. In her also, the transformation of the history of the cosmos into the Kingdom of God has already started." Translation is mine.

John Paul II sketches the beginning of a theology of time in his apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*. In this text, he again mentions the fullness of time, identifying it with God, who is eternity itself, and argues that “from this relationship of God with time there rises the duty to sanctify time.”<sup>107</sup> The *kairos* of the Incarnation is prefigured by special moments from the law of the Ancient Testament, such as jubilees and the weekly day of rest.<sup>108</sup> After God entered human time in Jesus Christ, the habit of consecrating a particular time to God had no reason to cease, quite the opposite in fact. From these reflections arose John Paul II’s understanding of Jubilees, such as the Marian Year of 1987-1988 and the Jubilee of 2000. Moreover, the Marian Year was proclaimed by John Paul II in order to initiate a kind of Marian advent in preparation for the third millennium.

While John Paul II considered the entry of the Church in the third millennium as a crucial mission of his pontificate, he also considered its preparation to be particularly Marian. At Lourdes, in 1983, he already spoke of the importance of Mary in a time of preparation for the Coming of Christ, in any kind of advent, closely echoing Montfort: “mais l’*Avent* est tout particulièrement *le temps de Marie*. C’est en elle seule que l’attente du genre humain tout entier, en ce qui concerne la venue du Christ, atteint son point culminant. Elle porte cette attente à sa plénitude: la plénitude de l’*Avent*.”<sup>109</sup> In this way, we see that, in the thought of John Paul II, the fullness of the waiting for God on the part of the creature meets the fulfillment of time in the Incarnation. This leads John Paul II to think of the third millennium through Mary, presenting her as the figure through whom the

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<sup>107</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*,” *Vatican*, §10.

<sup>108</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*,” *Vatican*, §12.

<sup>109</sup> John Paul II, “Homélie du Pape Jean Paul II, 15 août 1983,” *Vatican*, §6. “But *Advent* is particularly the *time of Mary*. It is in her only that the awaiting of all of humanity, regarding the coming of Christ, reaches its culminating point. She brings this awaiting to its fullness: the fullness of Advent.” Translation is mine. Emphasis is in the text.



Church must think of its eschatological direction. For this same reason, the third millennium is thus entrusted to Mary on October 8, 2000, with these words: “to you, Dawn of Salvation, we commit our journey through the new Millennium.”<sup>110</sup> Here, we should not understand the third millennium as some sort of expectation of an immediate end of time, rather as a special time, a *kairos*, capable of reminding the faithful that human history is on a pilgrimage to its final destination which is indeed coming closer.

## 2) A personalist Mariology: free participation and maternal mediation

As we have already touched upon, Mary is considered by Catholics, from Church Fathers to John Paul II, to be the archetype of what it means to be a creature in relation to the Creator. The twentieth century theologian Karl Rahner even called her the most perfectly redeemed human person, the “perfect Christian” so as to highlight the idea that Mary is, in her person, entirely ‘yes’ to God.<sup>111</sup> As John Paul II said: “everything in you (Mary) is *fiat*;<sup>112</sup> we can speak of Mary Most Human because she is also Mary Most Pure, pure receptivity and pure participation with God, as much as a human person is called to be so. This personalist approach to Mary became a great source of inspiration for John Paul II, who links it to two key themes from the Second Vatican Council, namely free participation and maternal mediation.

Firstly, John Paul II stresses the importance of Mary’s free consent, whether it is to the Incarnation or the Crucifixion. In the personalist philosophy of John Paul II, free and active participation is key to the realization of personhood for it combines both, the fact

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<sup>110</sup> John Paul II. “Act of Entrustment to Mary, 8 October 2000,” *Vatican*, §5.

<sup>111</sup> Rahner, Karl. *Mary, Mother of the Lord: Theological Meditations*, p.36.

<sup>112</sup> John Paul II. “Act of Entrustment to Mary, 8 October 2000,” *Vatican*, §1.

that humans are created for their own sake, and the relational existence of humans for whom communion is necessary. This paradoxical juxtaposition between the person existing for one's own sake and at the same time finding fulfillment only in surrendering oneself and living for others is typical in Wojtyla's understanding of the person as gift. The person must be fully free so as to be capable of making a total gift of self to others in love. Of course, Jesus is *the* Divine Person at the heart of Christianity, the one who, by making the most radical gift of self, is the most completely free. But Mary follows in his footsteps as closely as a human person can, especially shedding light on the mystery of participation.

For Wojtyla, participation is a negotiation between the I and the other, between individual interests and the common good, it is the actualization of love in a morally good act. "The commandment of love prescribes only this: that each of us must continually set ourselves the task of actually participating in the humanity of others, of experiencing the other as an *I*, as a person."<sup>113</sup> More specifically, participation belongs "to the property of the person by virtue of which human beings, while existing and acting together with others, are nevertheless capable of fulfilling themselves in this activity and existence."<sup>114</sup> Mary realizes her personhood by consciously accepting interdependence with God (a necessary dependence on God on her part and a willed humility on the part of God); she needed God to create and sustain her, and God asked for her consent to bring about his plan of salvation through her free and loving participation. Through her choice to act through, with, and for God, Mary embodies the "perfectly redeemed *participant*," as Bulzacchelli calls her.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Wojtyla, Karol. *Person and Community, Selected Essays*, p.203.

<sup>114</sup> Wojtyla, Karol. *Person and Community, Selected Essays*, p.237.

<sup>115</sup> Bulzacchelli, Richard H. "The Perfectly Redeemed Acting Person: Toward a Mariology of Proredemption." *Marian Studies*, p.146.

Quoting *Dei Verbum* and *Lumen gentium*, *Redemptoris Mater* underscores once more the importance of freedom and participation in the Mariology of John Paul II:

Indeed, at the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the "full submission of intellect and will," manifesting "the obedience of faith" to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine "I," and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with "the grace of God that precedes and assists" and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who "constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts. (John Paul II, 1987, §13)

Secondly, John Paul II always understands Mary's perfect cooperation as specifically related to her motherhood. Indeed, the Magisterium of the Church asserts that the motherhood of Christ is Mary's greatest privilege and the centre from which all of her other prerogatives flow.<sup>116</sup> Mariologists speak of two aspects of Mary's motherhood, namely her divine maternity (the dogma which proclaimed her mother of the human nature of the Word) and her spiritual maternity (which establishes her also as mother of the Body of Christ, the Church). As Mary's free and total cooperation with God comes to bear much fruit, Mary is called to become the mother, not only of the head of the Church, Jesus Christ, but also of the body of Christ, the Church. Thus, from being *Theotokos*, Mother of God, she becomes also Mother of the Church. Moreover, the universal, or catholic in its original sense, significance of the Church further extends her motherhood to all men and women. Again, *Redemptoris Mater* summarizes, in section 39, this particular emphasis of John Paul II's Mariology on maternal mediation: "along the path of this collaboration with the work of her Son, the Redeemer, Mary's motherhood itself underwent a singular transformation, becoming ever more imbued with 'burning charity' towards all those to whom Christ's

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<sup>116</sup> For more information on divine motherhood as the basic principle of Mariology in the Magisterium, see Griffin, Michael. "The Divine Motherhood, the Fundamental Principle of Mariology," *Marian Studies* and Hogan, William F. "The Fundamental Principle of Mariology According to the Magisterium," *Marian Studies*.

mission was directed.” Consequently, for John Paul II, Mariology not only helps our understanding of the human person, but it is also especially useful for thinking about the complementarity of the sexes and the specificities of the ‘feminine genius,’ as he will call it. Mary’s cooperation in the work of her Son is at once profoundly human and definitely feminine, bridal, and maternal.

### 3) Nuptiality: sexuality, Mary, and the Church

As we have just explored the numerous connections between Mariology and various themes which at first glance may seem unrelated, such as eschatology and personalist philosophy, we may remember the words of the former Auxiliary Bishop of New York, Austin Vaughan:

The title ‘Mother of the Church’ may seem to some to be a pious addendum, but it points up the uniqueness of the role of one woman in the Plan of Salvation, a uniqueness that was rooted in the maternal gifts that God had given her by nature and by grace. It gives us too, some profound insights into the role of woman and the role of human sexuality in the plan of salvation, in a period when Catholic teaching on both of these matters is seriously challenged. To put it simply: In God's Providence, doctrines on Mary are vitally connected with issues critical for knowing what Catholic faith is, how to express it and how to live it. To set them aside will often have a disastrous effect on teachings that seem at first glance to have little or no relationship to them. (Vaughan 1988, p.150-151)

John Paul II is known for his deep thinking regarding the significance of the body, the nuptial complementarity and specificities of masculinity and femininity, and how this plays out, both in personal relationships and in the Church at large. Furthermore, it was Mariology that seemed to have been the most useful resource for crafting his response to feminism. In fact, this link was made clear during the Marian year of 1987/1988 when he proposed both, his encyclical on Mary, which we have already mentioned extensively, and his apostolic letter “On the Dignity and Vocation of Women,” entitled *Mulieris dignitatem*.

As John Paul II developed his *Theology of the Body*, he wrestled with the meaning of embodied-ness, femininity, and masculinity. For him, humans are created in the image of God through their unique personhood but also through their mutual capacity for communion. Conscious that in his own time, feminism and its claims were a rising issue, he sought to propose a response which could at once meet the exigences of modern-day women while remaining embedded in Catholic teachings. Whether or not this attempt has been successful, the importance of Mariology in addressing such questions which are crucial to socio-political debates of today, such as gender ideology, sexual ethics, and family life, cannot be overlooked. By presenting the ‘woman’ as an archetype of humanity and by highlighting her unique relationship to God who becomes her Son, John Paul II proposes to think about the role of women especially in terms of persons and mothers. Personhood for John Paul II involves both being a free subject and living in communion with others, “existing in a relationship, in relation to the other ‘I.’”<sup>117</sup> This is fundamentally true of both men and women, but these human truths are most fully expressed in Mary’s life: from her consent at the Annunciation to her presence and participation in her son’s public ministry and sacrifice. In this way, Mary is the preeminent human person through whom we can understand the vocation of all human beings in relation to Jesus, the Second Divine Person made man; she is the model of what it means to be a creature (and only creature) in relation to the Creator.

But the figure of Mary would not be so important if it was not for her son, and so John Paul II always develops his Mariology through the lens of Mary’s relationship to Christ: the relationship of mother and son. While avoiding rigid categorizations of what is

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<sup>117</sup> John Paul II. “*Mulieris dignitatem*,” *Vatican*, §7.

masculine and what is feminine through the personalist lens, John Paul II uses the example of Mary to identify a special intimacy between women and the mystery of life and the openness to a new person. This does not mean that a woman must give birth to be fulfilled, rather it points to the usual readiness of women to accept the other as a person, whether that is a woman's own biological child, a 'spiritual child,' or anyone else. While this belongs more broadly to parenthood, he states that:

Parenthood - even though it belongs to both - is realized much more fully in the woman, especially in the prenatal period. It is the woman who "pays" directly for this shared generation, which literally absorbs the energies of her body and soul. It is therefore necessary that *the man* be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes *a special debt to the woman*. No programme of "equal rights" between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account. (John Paul II, 1988, §18)

In the Virgin-Mother Mary, John Paul II perceives what he calls the 'feminine genius,' and although he does not define it with precision, we see that the spiritual implications of the possibility of motherhood, understood in personalist terms, are at the core of what it means to be a woman. Additionally, we understand that for John Paul II, there is no way to address this crucial contemporary issue without turning to Mary. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

Finally, in his understanding of the complementarity between men and women, John Paul II also develops his vision of the Church as Bride. This starts with the nuptial analogy of the Church as the Bride of Christ the Bridegroom, and its significance extends unto the Catholic understanding of marriage between a man and a woman, which cannot be terminated except by death. For as Christ and the Church cannot be separated, so should it be with the man and woman whose covenant is a symbol of that indivisible union. Furthermore, John Paul II desires once more to avoid simplistic approaches to this nuptial mystery, clarifying that "in the Church every human being – male and female – is the

‘Bride,’ in that he or she accepts the gift of the love of Christ the Redeemer, and seeks to respond to it with the gift of his or her own person.”<sup>118</sup> However, Mary is the image of the Church not only as mother but also as bride. Montfort, in his own modified “Hail Mary,” makes sense of this through the Trinitarian approach: Mary is daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, and bride of the Spirit. In her, men and women of the Catholic Church can learn to become better Christians, freely, consciously, and completely cooperating with the Trinity in all things.

For John Paul II, the Church herself is two dimensional, and the Marian aspect of the Church is preeminent over the Petrine one:

The Marian dimension of the Church is antecedent to that of the Petrine, without being in any way divided from it or being less complementary. Mary Immaculate precedes all others, including obviously Peter himself and the Apostles. This is so, not only because Peter and the Apostles, being born of the human race under the burden of sin, form part of the Church which is 'holy from out of sinners,' but also because their triple function has no other purpose except to form the Church in line with the ideal of sanctity already programmed and prefigured in Mary. A contemporary theologian has rightly stated that Mary is 'Queen of the Apostles without any pretensions to apostolic powers: she has other and greater powers' (H. U. von Balthasar, "*Neue Klarstellungen*")." (*Address to the Cardinal and Prelates of the Roman Curia*, December 22, 1987)

Hence, Mary as a person and a woman is at the forefront of John Paul II’s thinking through the vocation and dignity of women and the nature and mission of the Church more broadly.

#### 4) A Marian apocalyptic and personalist view of consecration

John Paul II’s particularities which we have presented until now, namely his eschatological and personalist Mariology, converge towards his view of consecration to Mary. This leads to the harmonisation of his integration of conciliar Mariology with his

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<sup>118</sup> John Paul II. “*Mulieris dignitatem*,” *Vatican*, §25.

primary background heavily influenced by Montfortian spirituality. Manfred Hauke, who understood that Marian consecration was more than a mere pious devotion for John Paul II, spoke thus: “Total consecration to the Mother of God is an existential response to the universal spiritual maternity of Mary; through the consecration, a person accepts Mary’s mediation of all graces through Her participation in the universal mediation of Jesus Christ.”<sup>119</sup> For a man like John Paul II, who sought to understand his faith and to live it ever more deeply, consecration took on a whole new meaning and could never be presented lightly. It had to permeate every facet of life, everything became Mary’s, *totus tuus*. Knowing this, more attention needs to be given to the numerous acts of Marian consecration pronounced by the Pope, along with the invocation to Mary in several major documents.

The consecration of the newly founded Pontifical Institute for Marriage and the Family to Our Lady of Fatima in 1981 should be regarded in the same light. Indeed, on the one hand, this consecration was truly personal, for John Paul II was shot on his way to announce the creation of the institute, and as it was also the anniversary of the apparitions of Fatima, he saw his recovery as a sign and this consecration as thanksgiving. However, on the other hand, as we have discussed, he would also have approached consecration to Mary as the logical continuation of the personalist aspects of Mariology, elements which are, as we will see in our last chapter, deeply needed in the defense of the human vocation to marriage and the family.

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<sup>119</sup> Hauke, Manfred. “The Second Vatican Council’s Doctrine on Mary and St. Pope John Paul II’s Interpretation of It,” *Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej*, p.24. For John Paul II’s thoughts on the mediation of Mary, see his “General Audience: January 12, 2000,” *Vatican*.



#### D) Conclusion: Marian apocalypticism adopted and adapted

In his dense summary on the background of John Paul II's Marian devotion, O'Connor does not make mention of Marian apocalypticism *per se*. Yet, he does list a number of elements which are present in Marian apocalypticism as we have defined it in our first chapter: Marian shrines and the stories that surround them, Montfortian spirituality, Vatican II and how the Church should navigate and evangelize modern times, and, finally, Marian apparitions as they relate to political and historical struggles. With O'Connor's words, let us once more list the main elements we have highlighted in the first part of this chapter:

Czestochowa nurtured in him a simple, childlike trust in Mary. St. Louis de Montfort instructed his enquiring mind about the doctrinal principles of the devotion, at the same time making him realize the need for deliberate, firm and total commitment to her. Vatican II made him conscious of the "ecclesio-typical" vision of Mary, which he articulates above all as the *pilgrimage of faith* on which Mary goes before the People of God. Finally, Fatima drew his attention to the concrete, providential role of Mary as the Church's bastion in its mortal combat with Communism, which is the present and perhaps culminating phase of that perennial enmity between the Woman and the Serpent, between the children of Mary and the followers of Lucifer, of which St. Louis de Montfort has written. (O'Connor, p.112-113)

While integrating the more pietistic attitude towards Mary of his upbringing, Wojtyla also developed his Mariological thinking through several spiritual models such as Montfort and Kolbe while relying heavily on the contribution of Chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium*. From this transitional period, Wojtyla emerged with a peculiar Mariology, at once deeply traditional and yet altogether compatible with the post-conciliar emphasis on the human person. As Manfred Hauke writes,

John Paul II synthesizes in an original and harmonious way both old and new (*nova et vetera*) Marian teachings. The Polish pope joins the Christotypical camp of theology by writing about Mary's mediation and Her role as the type and Mother of the Church. The universal maternal mediation of Mary in Christ is reflected in

what is the pinnacle of Marian devotion — namely, consecration to the Mother of God. (Hauke, p. 38)

Among the most striking specificities of John Paul II's Mariology, we must especially remember the eschatological and personalist elements, and how they point to consecration, as this will be useful for continuing our inquiry.

#### IV) John Paul II's Marian apocalyptic defense of marriage and the family

After defining Marian apocalypticism and how it was adopted and adapted by John Paul II throughout his life, we will now explore the ways in which John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family can be considered Marian apocalyptic. To do so, we will look chronologically at important stages of John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family, including his couple's ministry during his early years as a parish priest and university chaplain, his artistic and philosophical writings as Bishop of Krakow, and eventually his papal documents and speeches. The last stage will be the most prolific one and so it will be more extensively covered. This roughly chronological study will try to show that John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family became truly Marian apocalyptic through his newfound connection to the Marian apparitions of Fatima in the aftermath of the assassination attempt against his life. In this way, John Paul II will build on Montfort and go beyond the latter's Marian eschatology by adding marriage and the family as key themes through which to understand the end times. However, we will see that John Paul II's attention to marriage and the family is always connected to Mary.

##### A) "Wujek:" the parish priest and student chaplain (1948-1958)

In *Gift and Mystery*, a short autobiographical meditation on his religious vocation, John Paul II identifies the pastoral care of couples and families as one of his main priorities

since the beginning of his priesthood, informing his scholarly and literary work.<sup>120</sup> In another part of the same book, he traces this focus back to his experience in Poland under Nazism and communism:

In this intense spiritual climate my mission as a priest and Bishop gradually took shape. The two totalitarian systems which tragically marked our century — Nazism on the one hand, marked by the horrors of war and the concentration camps, and communism on the other, with its regime of oppression and terror — I came to know, so to speak, from within. And so it is easy to understand my deep concern for the dignity of every human person and the need to respect human rights, beginning with the right to life. This concern was shaped in the first years of my priesthood and has grown stronger with time. It is also easy to understand my concern for the family and for young people. These concerns are all interwoven; they developed precisely as a result of those tragic experiences. (John Paul II, 1997, p.53)

Importantly, John Paul II underlines the connection between human dignity and the right to life and the wellbeing of couples and families. As we will see, these concerns will continue to be treated together in the later years of his pontificate. Simply put, for John Paul II, there can be no defense of human rights without a defense of the family and vice versa. This, in his mind, is especially evident in the Soviet Union's war against both human dignity and the family. It also points to the shift in narrative common to both Marian apocalyptic movements and John Paul II with the fall of the USSR, namely from anticommunism to promoting Catholic teachings in the face of the sexual revolution of the West. This also will be unraveled soon.

### 1) Communism and the family

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<sup>120</sup> "In my own life I have identified these priorities in the lay apostolate and particularly in the pastoral care of the family — an area in which lay people themselves have helped me so much — in youth ministry and in serious dialogue with the world of learning and culture. All this has been reflected in my scholarly and literary activity. This was the origin of my study *Love and Responsibility* and, among others, the literary work *The Jeweler's Shop*, which is subtitled *Meditations on the Sacrament of Marriage*." John Paul II, *Gift & Mystery*, p.71.

Before continuing our investigation of John Paul II's Marian apocalyptic defense of marriage and the family, we must understand what both twentieth-century Marian apocalypticism and John Paul II initially stood against: the communist stance towards sexual ethics and the family. In the *Communist Manifesto* of Engels and Marx, we can read:

Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists. On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution. The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital. Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty. But, you will say, we destroy the most hallowed of relations, when we replace home education by social. And your education! Is not that also social, and determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention, direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools, etc.? The Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class. (Marx and Engels, p.26)

As it is clearly stated in *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels and Marx saw the family as a bourgeois institution which treats the woman as a slave, prostitute, and machine for producing children, meanwhile the husband rules over the family, exploiting both wife and children while often committing infidelity. Already, in section 21 of Engels' *Principles of Communism*, we could find the communist goal thus summarized:

It will transform the relations between the sexes into a purely private matter which concerns only the persons involved and into which society has no occasion to intervene. It can do this since it does away with private property and educates children on a communal basis, and in this way removes the two bases of traditional marriage – the dependence rooted in private property, of the women on the man, and of the children on the parents. (Engels, §21)

Therefore, we can affirm that since the early days of the communist ideology its leaders have quite openly confessed their aim to undermine the family, and what they thought to

be its many evils, by changing established relations between men and women and between parents and children.

Alexandra Kollontai, who participated in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and later became a controversial politician even within the Soviet Union, was one of the main feminist activists of the early years of communism. Writing several pieces such as *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman* and *Communism and the Family*, she was also active in the Soviet government, along with her colleagues of the Communist Women's International, for the establishment of laws allowing no-fault divorce and abortion. She expressed the communist ideal for marriage and the family as such:

The family is withering away not because it is being forcibly destroyed by the state, but because the family is ceasing to be a necessity. The state does not need the family, because the domestic economy is no longer profitable: the family distracts the worker from more useful and productive labour. The members of the family do not need the family either, because the task of bringing up the children which was formerly theirs is passing more and more into the hands of the collective. In place of the old relationship between men and women, a new one is developing: a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal members of communist society, both of them free, both of them independent and both of them workers. No more domestic bondage for women. No more inequality within the family. No need for women to fear being left without support and with children to bring up. The woman in communist society no longer depends upon her husband but on her work. It is not in her husband but in her capacity for work that she will find support. She need have no anxiety about her children. The workers' state will assume responsibility for them. (Kollontai, "The State is Responsible for the Upbringing of Children")

However, the Russian government soon tried to hush Kollontai's criticisms of several Soviet policies. She was appointed in 1922 to serve as a diplomat, traveling to Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Mexico for instance, where she was able to continue sharing her ideas regarding sexuality and the family through hundreds of speeches and conferences. She met with local communist parties, wrote proletarian love stories and worked hand in

hand with other famous Marxist women, such as Klara Zetkin, German deputy and secretary of the Socialist Women's International.<sup>121</sup>

Interestingly, Kollontai was not consistently popular in the USSR partly due to the practical ambivalence of the Soviet government towards marriage and the family. Indeed, while the early days of Soviet policies saw the legalization of abortion and no-fault divorce and encouraged women to focus on factory work for the common good, communists came to realize that to destroy the family too quickly led to plummeting demographics and other social issues. Hence, regarding family policies in Soviet Russia, scholars have distinguished two phases. Kent Geiger says: "in a broad sense family policy changed from a radical to a conservative one."<sup>122</sup> Illustrating this claim, he continues: "For example, in 1920 abortion was legalized, in 1936 it was made illegal, and in 1955 it was again made legal."<sup>123</sup> Geiger calls the years 1934-1936 the 'turning point' in terms of Soviet family policy. Following Lenin's priority on the economic class struggle over any form of fixed morality, Anton Makarenko became a popular figure who promoted orderliness in the family, authority of the parents, and a sense of duty and self-discipline in the children.<sup>124</sup> The Soviet government adopted this view, against what Marx and Engels had to say, and started promoting the family as the basic cell of communist society. Under Stalin, female workers were told that homemaking was not so much of a petty bourgeois affair if it was to raise future communist workers, and marriage as a stable and exclusive union for spouses

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<sup>121</sup> Gafizova, Natalia. "KOLLONTAI, Alexandra (1872-1952)," *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, p.253-257.

<sup>122</sup> Geiger, H. Kent. *The Family in Soviet Russia*, p.321.

<sup>123</sup> Geiger, H. Kent. *The Family in Soviet Russia*, p.322.

<sup>124</sup> Geiger, H. Kent. *The Family in Soviet Russia*, p.89-90.

was once again promoted against sexual frivolity.<sup>125</sup> Kollontai's "new morality" of free love was now kept in check, and the Russian regime was once more forced to compromise its ideals in the face of reality. Yet, the change of attitude towards the family in Soviet Russia cannot be understood as defense of marriage and the family for the sake of these institutions. Rather, it seems that they have been promoted for the sake of the communist regime which strove to increase its population and discipline the workers in order to strengthen the country against foreign enemies. Geiger concludes his study of the family under communism by reasserting what many believe:

The answer, of course, lies in the nature of Soviet totalitarianism itself. The totalitarian mind refuses to recognize that society is pluralistic and that the family is an institution that cannot be shaped or controlled beyond a minimum degree by law, political doctrine, or power. Nevertheless, one also finds open Soviet minds, in which the family, like the church, education, the arts and sciences, works as a slow but effective enemy of totalitarianism. In the long view of history this special mission — to afford to the individual some privacy and protection against totalitarian encroachment — may prove to have been the Soviet family's most important function. (Geiger, p.331)

Such an interpretation of the role of the family echoes that of John Paul II who once wrote: "from both trials (the Nazi and communist occupations) the Polish Church emerged victorious, thanks to the sacrifices of Bishops, priests and countless lay people; thanks too to the Polish family, which is 'strong in God.'"<sup>126</sup> This understanding of the family as a bastion against totalitarianism will further crystallize in Marian apocalyptic circles with the cultural shift in the West away from traditional attitudes in terms of sexuality.

## 2) Ministering to couples: learning to love human love

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<sup>125</sup> Geiger, H. Kent. *The Family in Soviet Russia*, p.91-93.

<sup>126</sup> John Paul II, *Gift & Mystery*, p.52.



Karol Wojtyla was ordained a priest in 1946 but was sent to study in Rome almost immediately after. Hence, it was only in 1948 that he came back to Poland and became a parish priest, as well as a university chaplain. At once, he began ministering to students and young adults, but this quickly came to include a ministry for engaged couples and newlyweds. Wojtyla felt from the beginning of his priesthood that one of his missions was serving couples and families. Before he theorized on the subject and pronounced public speeches, he was, so to speak ‘in the trenches,’ helping his parishioners in practical situations. This involved a wide range of activities such as going on canoe trips with young adults, giving courses for preparing couples to marriage, or providing spiritual advice to young parents. At the same time, it was also a period of formation for Wojtyla who later recalled in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* that it taught him to love human love:

it is necessary to prepare young people for marriage, it is necessary *to teach them love*. Love is not something that is learned, and yet there is nothing else as important to learn! *As a young priest I learned to love human love*. This has been one of the fundamental themes of my priesthood, my ministry in the pulpit, in the confessional, and also in my writing. (John Paul II, 1994, p.123)

For the priest who was affectionately called ‘*Wujek*’ or ‘Uncle’ by the students he ministered to, protecting the institutions of marriage and the family could not be done without befriending young couples and families in real life.

### 3) The Polish cultural resistance against totalitarian regimes

Of course, Wojtyla’s early priesthood was taking place in extraordinary circumstances, as Poland was alternately under the control of Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. Wojtyla was trained in an underground seminary, and he lived through the assassination of fellow seminarians before he was even ordained. Once a priest, he had to remain careful while the regime tried to instill fear in both clergy and faithful. This,

indeed, was why his students called him ‘Uncle’ and not ‘Father.’<sup>127</sup> However, Wojtyla was not easily impressed, and he resisted totalitarianism in two complementary ways, namely culture and education. On the one hand, he promoted artistic expression and the cultural heritage of the Polish nation. On the other hand, as a professor and university chaplain, he believed that education, in his case especially in terms of morality and philosophy, was crucial to the formation of the Polish youth, who would hopefully one day be called to rebuild their country.

Before discerning a vocation to the priesthood, young Wojtyla had wanted to be an actor, later becoming a member of the underground Rhapsodic Theater, to which he remained committed afterwards. Through key poets and playwrights of Polish Romanticism (such as Sienkiewicz and Mickiewicz),<sup>128</sup> and by continuing to produce artistic pieces, Wojtyla found a peaceful way to resist, protecting the Polish history and identity while avoiding violent acts of rebellion. As we have already touched upon in the previous chapter, Wojtyla also took from Polish Romanticism a sense that the history of Poland, and more specifically the Poles’ suffering, was deeply intertwined with the history of salvation. This perspective became evident in the plays Wojtyla came to write, such as *David*, *Job* or *Jeremiah*.<sup>129</sup> As Weigel explains, for Polish Romantics, “partitioned Poland was a Messiah among nations, a suffering servant whose time on Calvary would redeem the world and show it the path beyond Western materialism.”<sup>130</sup> As we can see, Polish Romanticism as an artistic movement was deeply committed to thinking with Christian theology and morality.

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<sup>127</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.89.

<sup>128</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.34.

<sup>129</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.62.

<sup>130</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.34.

The movement further expanded into propositions for education and the promotion of Catholic virtues, following this simple yet impactful line of thought: “history had a spiritual core; the deterioration of its traditional national virtues had caused Poland’s political collapse; re-establishing Polish independence required recovering those virtues as the foundation of a new Polish state.”<sup>131</sup> Therefore, it was impossible for Wojtyla to envision the Polish cultural resistance without due attention to the moral education of the Poles on top of their artistic formation. Cultural resistance against totalitarian occupation had to pass through art but could not stop there, it had to lead to the highest good, the proper worship of God through right living and praise. In Wojtyla’s mind, a healthy culture needed a fitting cult. Organizing courses for marriage preparation and engaging with the theology of marriage and the family thus became, for Wojtyla, necessary means to defend marriage and the family against a communist regime set either on destroying or manipulating them.

#### B) Bishop, Archbishop, and Cardinal Wojtyla of Krakow (1958-1978)

As a prince of the Church, Wojtyla took the prophetic dimension of his office very seriously. Fighting the communist programme became one of his primary goals, and it especially involved the promotion of Catholic doctrine regarding the truth about God and about man. The communist government was not fond of a man who had helped its workers build a church in the midst of the proffered proletarian heaven of Nowa Huta. Indeed, Wojtyla left no stone unturned, energetically fighting for the liberation of Poland which, he believed, passed through the well-being of Polish families. Thus, he took the initiative to teach his flock Catholic doctrine in two crucial ways, which were the two ways promoted

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<sup>131</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.34.

by Polish Romanticism, namely art and education. This twofold method is especially relevant when we look at his works on marriage and the family, the defense of which he refused to leave incomplete. This section will thus include *The Jeweler's Shop*, which is a play in prose published under a pen name in 1960, and *Love and Responsibility*, a philosophical work he wrote during his professorial years at the Catholic University of Lublin.

1) *The Jeweler's Shop: thinking marriage and the family through art*

In his "Letter to Artists," John Paul II writes that "in producing a work, artists express themselves to the point where their work becomes a unique disclosure of their own being, of what they are and of how they are what they are."<sup>132</sup> As was mentioned in passing, John Paul II himself was an artist; he performed in an underground theater which he co-founded when he was young, created several plays, and even wrote poems during sessions of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>133</sup> As a priest, he wrote *The Jeweler's Shop: A Meditation on the Sacrament of Matrimony, Passing on Occasion into a Drama*, a meditative play on marriage and family.

The narrative combines several couples connected to one another: the first act relates the beautiful yet tragic story of Andrew and his soon-to-be widow Teresa, the second evokes the bitterness existing between Stefan and Anna, and the third tells us about the relationship between the respective children of both previously mentioned couples, Christopher and Monica. Each couple at one point finds itself in front of the jeweler's shop

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<sup>132</sup> John Paul II, "Letters to Artists," *Vatican*, §2.

<sup>133</sup> Weigel, George. *Witness to Hope: A Biography of Pope John Paul II*, p.155-157.

whose window mirrors their own memories and conscience. The text is, among other things, a response to the communist perspective on marriage, in the sense that it acknowledges real issues present in marriages while providing a different solution than the communist one. Indeed, Anna and Stefan's conjugal relationship seems quite hypocritical, having become, after years of animosity, a mere contract without love. However, for Wojtyla, the answer to such a situation is not to give up and seek divorce, discarding marriage as a mere piece of paper, rather the story leads to a meeting with absolute Love, Jesus the Bridegroom accompanied by a priestly figure named Father Adam, and the slow recovery of the will to love and the effort to give of oneself to the other through humility, forgiveness, and faith.

## 2) *Love and Responsibility*: a personalist defense of Catholic sexual ethics

With *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyla in a way translated what he had done in poetic form in *The Jeweler's Shop* into a rigorous philosophical treaty on Catholic sexual ethics. This was achieved through the lens of the human person, body and soul, who, being free to love or negate love, finds his or her fulfillment in acting freely in accordance with the will of God. While *The Jeweler's Shop* presented to us fictional characters, *Love and Responsibility* proposes to the audience that every couple is “an actor in the drama – *dramatis persona* – in which it writes ‘its truest history,’ the history of love or its negation.”<sup>134</sup> Wojtyla opposes an Aristotelian definition of love as “willing the good of the other” to a utilitarian approach, where someone uses another person for their own selfish ends, refusing to treat that person according to their unique dignity. In Wojtyla's language,

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<sup>134</sup> John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility*, p.13.

this comes down to the law of gift: a person must give themselves entirely to another and, in that sacrificial loosing of self, will find the meaning of his or her own existence. This personalist framework for understanding the theology of marriage and the family flowed from Wojtyla's contemplation of the Three Divine Persons, the Father ever generating the Son in the common love of the Holy Spirit. It also sprang forth from his meditation on Jesus' perfect gift of self in sacrificial love and Mary's own participation in the Paschal mystery. At no point in Wojtyla's thought can we remove either element: his trinitarian Christology and his Mariology directly inform his theology of the person, marriage, and the family.

### C) Pope John Paul II (1978-2005)

Elected Pope in 1978, John Paul II kept from his years as Bishop the Montfortian motto "*Totus tuus*" and, on his blazon, Mary's "M" stood at the foot of the cross. His first words to the faithful expressed his wish to confess their common faith and hope and their "trust in the Mother of Christ and of the Church."<sup>135</sup> During his inaugural mass, he spoke words of courage which still resound today in the hearts of many Catholics: "do not be afraid."<sup>136</sup> In his first *Angelus*, the new Pope ended with "la famiglia prende inizio dalla volontà del Padre, ma sempre viene concepita sotto il cuore della Madre," at once referring to the human family created by God and saved through the Incarnation of Jesus which began in the womb of Mary, and implying that the mystery of divine vocation and human participation is also present at the heart of every family.<sup>137</sup> From this point on, the following

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<sup>135</sup> John Paul II, "Primo saluto e prima benedizione ai fedeli, 16 ottobre 1978" *Vatican*.

<sup>136</sup> John Paul II, "Omelia di Giovanni Paolo II per l'inizio del pontificato, 22 ottobre 1978," *Vatican*, §5.

<sup>137</sup> John Paul II, "*Angelus*, 22 ottobre 1978," *Vatican*. "The family comes first from the will of the Father, but it always comes to be conceived in the heart of the Mother." Translation is mine.

speeches, homilies, and other papal interventions were marked by a significant Marian devotion, promoting for example the rosary and pilgrimages to Marian shrines.

During his first trip back to Poland after his election, the Pope publicly entrusted to Our Lady of Czestochowa the entirety of his pontificate, the Church, and the world, ending with these words addressed once more to Mary: “Sanctify families. Watch over the souls of the young and the hearts of the children. Help us to overcome the great moral threats against the fundamental spheres of life and love.”<sup>138</sup> As soon as he became the Bishop of Rome, John Paul II demonstrated his lifelong commitment for the protection of marriage and the family, in continuity with the Second Vatican Council which listed “fostering the nobility of marriage and the family” as the first of its considerations of “some problems of special urgency.”<sup>139</sup> Interestingly, while John Paul II was starting his pontificate, Marian apocalypticism was also going through subtle changes. Indeed, while it remained anchored in its anti-communist attitude as the Cold War was quietly raging, it began to focus on a certain theme with unprecedented dedication, namely the defense of marriage and the family. This was in part a natural development due to the changes in the culture, but it could be seen as influenced by the new Pope as well. We will start our exploration of John Paul II’s pontificate with this shift in order to understand the context of his ministry.

### 1) The shape-shifting dragon: “Russia will spread her errors”

According to Sister Lucia, in 1917, the Virgin Mary warned the three Portuguese shepherds against “the errors of Russia” which were about to spread around the world if Mary’s requests (more specifically the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart and

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<sup>138</sup> John Paul II, “Act of Consecration to the Mother of God at Jasna Gora, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1979,” *Vatican*.

<sup>139</sup> “*Gaudium et spes*,” *Vatican*, §46-47.

the First Saturdays devotion) were not heeded. Additionally, Mary reportedly stated that (no matter what) “the Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world.” The message of Fatima was relayed throughout the Church, starting in the 1940s, as a powerful prophecy against communism in the midst of World War II and the Cold War which soon followed.

The Fatima apparitions became increasingly popular as their messages were spread by global movements such as the International Pilgrim Statue, a statue of Our Lady of Fatima which traveled throughout the world from diocese to diocese. Margry offers this description:

The globe-trotting International Pilgrim Virgin statue became engaged in a long succession of annual trips, including a round-the-world tour in 1978 that began in the US, then went to Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, India, Egypt, Israel, Rome, Austria, Budapest, Hungary, several cities in Poland, Santiago, Spain, Berlin, and Lourdes, France. At each stop, the figure was the focal point of the Blue Army’s program, “Our Lady of Fatima’s Peace Plan from Heaven,” which was distributed in a pamphlet that outlined her story and the vision that “foretells World War II and Communism” (Anon. 1950: 9). It was a message of good versus evil. Louis Kaczmarek, the statue’s official escort from 1975 to 1993, framed devotion to Fátima in a lively demonology that infused the communist threat with an apocalypticism that featured Mary as God’s principal instrument of redemption in the modern age (Kaczmarek 1986: 28-35). The dedication of the Pilgrim Virgin statue to fighting the satanically driven atheism of Soviet Russia was the Blue Army’s interpretation of the message of Fátima. (Margry, p.129)

Indeed, Marian movements particularly focused on Fatima spent much of their resources fighting communism, whether through the circulation of pamphlets, the call to pray for the conversion of Russia (understood more specifically to be at least a turn away from atheist communism if not a conversion to Catholicism), or the fabrication of rosaries sent out to allied soldiers. Thus, with Fatima especially, but also throughout the wider range of Marian apocalyptic worldviews within the Catholic Church, the chief focus of Marian apocalyptic proponents in the first half of the twentieth century and during the beginning of the Cold



War was to fight along Mary's "blue army" against the "red dragon" of communism with the belief that the "Woman of the Apocalypse" had already crushed its head.

However, starting in the 1980s with the perestroika and later the fall of the USSR, Marian apocalyptic movements faced an important question: with the end of communism, was Fatima (and other strongly apocalyptic Marian apparitions) still relevant? John Paul II and many other Catholics answered positively. The rejection of traditionally conservative values brought about by the cultural and sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s became the new face of the enemy. The red dragon of Communist Russia had shape-shifted and Marian devotees were now fighting against the cultural consequences of liberal consumerism. This shift in narrative is noted by most Marian apparitional scholars. For example, Maunder writes:

The other great trial for traditional Catholicism (along with communism) arises from the social and moral change in liberal democracies. This has become the most enduring of the threatening contexts in which apparitions spring forth to issue their warnings and reassurances. America may have helped to liberate Western Europe from Nazism and communism, but it also spread its own doctrines of liberalism and consumerism. From the 1950s, visionaries across Europe began to articulate concerns about the effects of these. (Maunder 2016, p.195)

Margry adds:

In the wake of the Soviet Union's capitulation and the revelation of the third secret (in which the Holy Father and a host of bishops are executed), the devotion of Fátima has shifted to other passions gripping conservative Roman Catholicism. Islam, abortion, homosexuality, divorce, and a liberal theology and reformist spirit identified with the Second Vatican Council have occupied many devotees who have struggled to recode the devotion with a mission that salvages the "message of Fátima" as something still compelling and calling to pilgrims the world over. There is, of course, no shortage of causes. And the imagery remains to anchor the devotion to a continuity that transcends social change and the vicissitudes of history. (Margry, p.130)

Although both scholars are also thinking about Marian apparitions which were rejected by the Vatican, their remarks are relevant to our work. Evidently, the transition from anti-

communism to fighting the sexual revolution had a theoretical foundation beyond the simple fact that the message of Fatima had to live on. In the eyes of Marian apocalyptic proponents, one ideology simply descended from the other, the sexual revolution was, in many ways, considered to be the child of communism.

As we have seen in a previous section, Engels, Marx, and their followers in the Bolshevik Revolution had much to say regarding the family and traditional sexual ethics. A century later, the drastic cultural change which took place in Western societies was also deeply emmeshed with questions pertaining to sexuality and family relations. Carl Trueman, in his works *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* and *Strange New World* takes us back to the origins of the cultural and sexual revolution which happened in the twentieth century, beginning with Marxism:

In seeing the identity of human beings as constituted by economic relations and in regarding history as a political struggle determined by economic relations, Marx makes all intentional human activity political. Everything, from religious organizations to the structure of the family, is politicized. There is no private, prepolitical space in Marx's world. And that is now basic to the world of today, where all things are politicized, from kindergartens and Girl Scout troops to adoption agencies, sports teams, and pop music. (Trueman 2020, p.173)

Additionally, while Trueman acknowledges the fact that “certain key elements of our modern world were already being put in place in the thought of nineteenth-century writers,”<sup>140</sup> such as Nietzsche and Darwin, he focuses particularly on Freud. According to Trueman, Freud's influence lies in conflating personal happiness and identity with sexual satisfaction. Commenting on Freud's work *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Trueman argues:

If happiness is the desired goal of all human beings, then for Freud the pleasure principle— the quest for pleasure focused on sexual gratification— is central to

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<sup>140</sup> Trueman, Carl R., *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*, 2020, p.175.

what it means to be a self. The purpose of life, and the content of the good life, is personal sexual fulfillment. This principle also reorients thinking on the purpose of sex: the purpose of procreation is subordinated to the purpose of personal pleasure. (Trueman 2020, p.178)

To back such a theory, Freud needed to argue that sexual gratification was the goal of all stages of human life, whether it was repressed, sublimated, or expressed openly. This also furthered the sexualization of children which had already started with the end of the eighteenth century, giving it a scientific allure.

After Marx and Freud's role in thinking through the foundations of the sexual revolution, Trueman exposes the politicization of sex and the rise of the 'New Left' which combined both Marxist and Freudian ideas in the critical theory developed by the Frankfurt School. To name only a few thinkers, Wilhelm Reich, who came up with the term 'sexual revolution' in his book *The Sexual Revolution* (1936), joined the Communist Party of Austria, and later of Germany, and visited the Soviet Union to give a lecture on psychoanalysis before moving to America.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, many other key figures involved in the development of critical theory and its instrumentalization in the sexual revolution were sympathetic to or directly associated with communism. For example, Herbert Marcuse, one of the most famous members of the Frankfurt School, presented a public lecture in San Diego in 1974 entitled "Marxism and Feminism" where he argued that the liberation of women from (capitalist) patriarchy would pass through socialism and vice versa. Eventually, socialist and/or Marxist feminism became its own movement with famous figures such as Angela Davis, a former philosophy professor at UCLA and a famous

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<sup>141</sup> On their website, the Wilhelm Reich Museum explains: "To reach the greatest number of people, he (Reich) worked within the Socialist and Communist parties in Vienna, and later in Berlin, to promote sex education, birth control, divorce rights, and better housing. Reich recalled that in Berlin there were about fifty thousand people in his organization in the first year." <https://wilhelmreichmuseum.org/about/biography-of-wilhelm-reich/?v=40f9d8362b89>

Black Panther activist, and Gayle Rubin, writer of “Thinking Sex,” an essay considered to be foundational for gender studies and queer theory.

The connections are seen by Marian apocalyptically inclined Catholics as evidence that the sexual revolution is a fruit of the communist tree. To grasp the extent of the assimilation of communism with the sexual revolution by Marian apocalyptic proponents, we must also remember an assertion of the young Jacinta, one of the three seers at Fatima, namely that “the sins which lead the most souls to hell are the sins of the flesh.”<sup>142</sup> This saying is often used by Fatima devotees to further justify their emphasis on Catholic sexual ethics in opposition to the propositions of the sexual revolution such as ‘free love,’ the propagation of pornography, or contraception. For example, Massimo Introvigne, an Italian sociologist of new religious movements and former general secretary of the conservative group Alleanza Cattolica, published in 1983 an article which identified socialist democracies as permissive societies.<sup>143</sup> La Famiglia del Cuore Immacolato di Maria, an Italian association of consecrated and lay faithful desiring to live in the spirit of Fatima, mentions the words of Jacinta which we have quoted in its magazine *Maria di Fatima*.<sup>144</sup> To further illustrate this long-lasting Marian apocalyptic attitude towards the sexual revolution, we can also look at a recent homily from Rev. Joseph Perry, the Episcopal Advisor for the World Apostolate of Fatima USA. Exactly a hundred and seven years after the first apparition at Fatima, this former Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago calls the sexual

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<sup>142</sup> De Marchi, Giovanni, *Era una Signora piu splendente del sole*, p.275.

<sup>143</sup> Massimo Introvigne, “Socialismo e rivoluzione sessuale,” *Cristianità* n.97.

<sup>144</sup> Cuomo, Ceasre, “Beati i puri di cuore,” *Maria di Fatima* n.6.

revolution and its consequences “the new totalitarianism” against which Mary would call for prayer if she was to appear here and now.<sup>145</sup>

Combined with an apparent opposition to Catholic doctrine, the polarization of politics during the Cold War along with the apparitional Mary’s fight against communism encouraged Marian apocalyptic Catholics to reject the theoretical and practical propositions of the cultural revolution. Thus, for proponents of Marian apocalyptic worldviews, the shift from fighting Sovietism to opposing the sexual liberation was easy. The sexual revolution thus became identified as being a collection of “errors of Russia” spreading throughout the world. Mary’s prophecy at Fatima was now taking place. While John Paul II aligned with this staunchly anti-communist position, he brought more nuance to the discussion, understanding that the sexual revolution was arising in part also because of real issues in terms of sexuality and the treatment of women. As a Slavic Pope, he was also quicker to point to the responsibility of Western societies, and not only Russia, for the shift in morality. In the mind of John Paul II, both communist and ultra-capitalistic societies were built on a materialistic view of the human person, leading to the rejection of inherent human dignity. This became a topic he addressed over and over, beginning with the *Theology of the Body*.

## 2) The Theology of the Body

Less than a year after becoming Pope, John Paul II started a cycle of Wednesday audiences which came to be called the *Theology of the Body*. During these audiences, he presented a theological integration of Catholic teachings on sexuality with his personalist

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<sup>145</sup> Perry, Joseph, “The New Totalitarianism Requires Our Urgent Response,” *World Apostolate of Fatima USA*.

background. This corpus of teachings is among the most studied works of Wojtyla and constitutes the theological continuation of what he had begun in *Love and Responsibility*. It is considered by many theologians to be a visionary engagement with contemporary issues linked to gender identity, sexual ethics, and the Christian approach to the body. Concerning the topic of our current chapter, three elements of the *Theology of the Body* will be discussed here, namely the personalist framework also used by John Paul II for developing his Mariology, the Marian aspect of the *Theology of the Body*, and finally the sense of necessity and urgency in defending marriage and the family.

Firstly, we will expand on John Paul II's personalist approach to marriage and the family. This is indeed one of the most important elements to grasp in order to understand John Paul II's theoretical approach to Catholic sexual ethics. This personalism which is, in the *Theology of the Body*, linked to the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2, was presented in many ways as an antidote to modern challenges. To those who assumed that sexuality has no intrinsic meaning, John Paul II spoke of the significance of the "*body that expresses the person*."<sup>146</sup> To the utilitarian view which sees men and women as mere means to an end, whether that end is money, power or pleasure, the Pope, relying on the history of Catholic teachings, asserted that the dignity of the human being stems from being created in God's image, as a person made for his or her own sake and capable of fulfilling themselves in the gift of self out of love.<sup>147</sup> To liberal individualism and communism alike, John Paul II answered that a person exists in relation to others as persons (which is

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<sup>146</sup> John Paul II, "Revelation and Discovery of the Nuptial Meaning of the Body," *Theology of the Body*, §4.

<sup>147</sup> John Paul II, "The Man-Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love," *Theology of the Body*, §3. "Man is the only creature in the world that the Creator willed 'for its own sake.' (...) This same man, willed by the Creator in this way right from 'the beginning,' can find himself only in the disinterested giving of himself." For a critique of a utilitarian approach to man, see also "The Heart: A Battlefield Between Love and Lust," in the same work.

communion) while maintaining his or her original solitude, or uniqueness.<sup>148</sup> In opposition to those who saw sexuality, masculinity and femininity as things to be constructed and deconstructed, John Paul II saw gifts to be received, known, and shared.<sup>149</sup> In contrast to Freud, John Paul II rejects “the naturalistic category that is contained in the concept and in the expression of sexual instinct.” Instead, the Pope wishes to underline the fundamental difference between animals and human beings, who are rational animals made in the image of God.<sup>150</sup> Finally, by covering art and culture from April 15th to May 6th of 1981, John Paul II brings our attention to the ways in which new technologies and mass-media can objectivize the body, promoting a culture of lust and impurity.

Hence, the same personalistic principles of self-possession and self-giving on which John Paul II’s Mariology is founded, as we have seen in the previous chapter, are found also at the core of his understanding of sexuality, marriage and the family. While personalism is not necessarily related to Marian apocalypticism in general, John Paul II was so heavily influenced by this mode of thinking that it became an important lens for him to understand the role of Mary in the history of salvation. Similarly, personalism came to bear an obvious and profound impact on John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*. These two elements of our study - marriage and the family, and Marian apocalypticism – share key theoretical assumptions and orientations in the thought of Wojtyla: namely the dignity of

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<sup>148</sup> John Paul II, “Man becomes the Image of God by Communion of Persons,” *Theology of the Body*, §3. Regarding man, male and female, being in the image of God both through his or her own uniqueness and through their capacity for communion: “Right ‘from the beginning,’ he (man) is not only an image in which the solitude of a person who rules the world is reflected, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons.”

<sup>149</sup> John Paul II, “Man and Woman: A Mutual Gift for Each Other,” *Theology of the Body*.

<sup>150</sup> John Paul II, “Celibacy is a Particular Response to the Love of the Divine Spouse,” *Theology of the Body*.

the human being created in the image of the Three Divine Persons for a life spent in the fruitful and interpersonal exchange of love.

Secondly, Mariologists have pointed out the place of Mary, the perfect woman, spouse, and mother, within John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, along with the consequences of this work for modern Mariology itself. However, we must begin by acknowledging that Mary is less explicitly mentioned in the *Theology of the Body* than in many other works of John Paul II. Yet, these Wednesday catecheses provide a rich background upon which to meditate on the meaning of Mary's femininity, virginity, and motherhood. Knowing that, for John Paul II, Mary was never an option among other devotions, but always came with her Son, all of his theology – which is deeply Christocentric – can and must also be related to Mary. In his meditation entitled “The Mystery of Woman Is Revealed in Motherhood (March 12, 1980),” John Paul II's implicit Mariology is especially obvious. As we have seen in Chapter II, the divine motherhood of Mary constitutes the key principle of John Paul II's Mariology. In his *Theology of the Body*, he comes back to motherhood and the dignity of the woman, from Eve to the New Eve and through every single woman in history:

The whole exterior constitution of woman's body, its particular aspect, the qualities which, with the power of perennial attractiveness, are at the beginning of the knowledge, which Genesis 4:1-2 speaks of ("Adam knew Eve his wife"), are in close union with motherhood. The Bible (and subsequently the liturgy), with its characteristic simplicity, honors and praises throughout the centuries "the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked" (Lk 11:27). These words constitute a eulogy of motherhood, of femininity, of the female body in its typical expression of creative love. In the Gospel these words are referred to the Mother of Christ, Mary, the second Eve. The first woman, on the other hand, at the moment when the maternal maturity of her body was revealed for the first time, when she conceived and bore, said: "I have begotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gn 4:1 ).

These words express the whole theological depth of the function of begetting-procreating. The woman's body becomes the place of the conception of the new man. In her womb, the conceived man assumes his specific human aspect before



being born. The somatic homogeneousness of man and woman, which found its first expression in the words: "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23), is confirmed in turn by the words of the first woman-mother: "I have begotten a man!" In giving birth, the first woman is fully aware of the mystery of creation, which is renewed in human generation. She is also fully aware of the creative participation that God has in human generation, his work and that of her husband, since she says: "I have begotten a man with the help of the Lord. (John Paul II, March 12, 1980)

Here, John Paul II clearly links personalism with the mystery of femininity as it is revealed in the beginning of the Old Testament, with Eve, and in the beginning of the New Testament, with Mary. The woman is the locus of the creation of the new human person and, with the help of the man and according to the design of God, she is "the subject of the new human life that is conceived and develops in her."<sup>151</sup> This is what John Paul II emphasizes the most regarding motherhood and it can also help us understand why he incessantly links the figure of Mary with the defense of human dignity. Mothers are understood by the Pope as uniquely positioned to defend the inherent rights of the human person, especially in their most fragile and vulnerable stages of development. This intrinsic connection between personhood and motherhood will be further developed in other papal documents, including *Redemptoris Mater*, *Mulieris dignitatem*, and *Evangelium vitae*.

Thirdly, the *Theology of the Body* speaks of several reasons why John Paul II considered it a matter of necessity and urgency to defend marriage and the family. In John Paul II's own words:

Understanding of the fundamental meanings contained in the mystery of creation, such as the nuptial meaning of the body (and of the fundamental conditionings of this meaning), is important. It is indispensable in order to know who man is and who he should be, and therefore how he should mold his own activity. It is an essential and important thing for the future of the human ethos. (Feb 13, 1980)

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<sup>151</sup> John Paul II, "The Mystery of Woman is Revealed in Motherhood," *Theology of the Body*.

In fact, while the defense of marriage and the family is not necessarily the only goal of the *Theology of the Body*, which also provides reflections for example on the vocation to consecrated celibacy and on the nuptial identity of the Church, marriage and the family are given a major dignity and role.

The first part of the *Theology of the Body* exposes the theoretical basis for the second part, which touches upon the practical consequences of such a theology. If we properly grasp that the body reveals the person, that the complementarity of femininity and masculinity points to the fruitful communion of persons in body and spirit, and that the emergence of a new family is a special icon of the Trinitarian God, it is not hard to realize that defending the institutions in which those realities are manifested is of great importance, both for the well-being of humanity and for the worship of the Creator. Additionally, following the Catholic belief in the devil, it is not difficult either to comprehend that what is most sacred in the eyes of God will be what is most attacked by the ones who hate God. This, John Paul II asserts, is what we see happening “from the beginning,” in the story of the Fall narrated in Genesis 3. “Questioning in his heart the deepest meaning of the donation, that is, love as the specific motive of the creation and of the original covenant (cf. Gn 3:5), man turns his back on God-Love, on the Father.”<sup>152</sup> Through this first turning away of man arises the distance characterized by shame and lust. As John Paul II extensively covers the consequences of what in Catholicism is called the doctrine of original sin, we can see that it is impossible for him to treat of the dignity of the person, the sanctity of the body, the meaning of sexuality and the ethical responsibility which it implies without assuming that these principles are under attack since the beginning of

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<sup>152</sup> John Paul II, “Concupiscence is the Fruit of the Breaking of the Covenant with God,” *Theology of the Body*, §4.

history. Furthermore, while personhood, sexuality, marriage and the family have always been vulnerable, there is a sense in these Wednesday catecheses that modern developments may threaten them even more. For instance, John Paul II argues that with the advance of modern science comes a greater temptation to treat the body “as an object of manipulation.”<sup>153</sup> Quoting *Gaudium et spes* §47, John Paul II says:

Here is how the Second Vatican Council – placing among the most urgent problems of the Church in the modern world the dignity of marriage and the family – characterizes the situation that exists in this area: ‘The happy picture of the dignity of these partnerships (that is, marriage and the family) is not reflected everywhere, but is overshadowed by polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love and similar blemishes; furthermore married love is too often dishonoured by selfishness, hedonism and unlawful contraceptive practices. (John Paul II, April 8, 1981, §5)

From his early work as Pope to his latter encyclicals, John Paul II always tried to emphasize the continuity of his vision for marriage and the family with that of previous Popes, especially Paul VI with his encyclical *Humanae vitae*, while bringing his own personalistic background to the table.

### 3) The Pontifical Council for Marriage and the Family, Fatima, and the assassination attempt

To advance his mission of defending marriage and the family still more, John Paul II decided to found a Pontifical Council for Marriage and the Family which would replace the former Committee for the Family instituted in 1973 by Paul VI. Therefore, in the third year of his pontificate, he promulgated the motu proprio “*Familia a Deo instituta*,” creating a council oriented towards the pastoral care of families, the diffusion of the Church’s doctrine regarding problems encountered by families, especially that of

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<sup>153</sup> John Paul II, “Pedagogy of the Body, Moral Order, Affective Manifestations,” *Theology of the Body*, §3.

responsible procreation, the study of matrimonial and familial spirituality, the protection of life from its conception, and the advancement of scientific research in such fields in harmony with Catholic beliefs. The justification given was that the family is the “prime and vital cell of human society,” that the Church had always been attentive to its problems and that she was now even more focused on helping the family, which faced an increase of both means to support it and threats which could destroy it. John Paul II appointed Cardinal Carlo Caffarra as the first president of this Pontifical Council for Family. The motu proprio was published on May 9, 1981, but it was to be publicly proclaimed during the usual Wednesday audience four days later – except that, on his way to make this declaration in piazza San Pietro, John Paul II was shot.

Mehmet Ali Agca’s attempt to assassinate the Pope marks the beginning of John Paul II’s heightened Marian apocalypticism, especially through his renewed devotion to Our Lady of Fatima, on whose feast day he was shot (May 13, 1981 marked the sixty-fourth anniversary of Mary’s first apparition to Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco). It is also an important moment for the bridging of Marian apocalypticism with the defense of marriage and the family. Indeed, it is after the assassination attempt that John Paul II first asked to read the third part of the secret of Fatima, which was still hidden in the Secret Archives of the Vatican.<sup>154</sup> This part of the message of Fatima was related by Sister Lucia as such:

After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: 'Penance, Penance, Penance!'. And we saw in an immense light that is God: 'something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it' a Bishop dressed in White 'we had the impression that it was the Holy Father'. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top

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<sup>154</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “The Message of Fatima: Introduction,” *Vatican*.

of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God. (The Message of Fatima)

In fact, John Paul II understood the martyrdom of the “Bishop dressed in white” in the vision at Fatima to be pointing to the attempt against his own life. As Ratzinger wrote:

When, after the attempted assassination on 13 May 1981, the Holy Father had the text of the third part of the «secret» brought to him, was it not inevitable that he should see in it his own fate? He had been very close to death, and he himself explained his survival in the following words: «... it was a mother's hand that guided the bullet's path and in his throes the Pope halted at the threshold of death» (13 May 1994). (The Message of Fatima)

As Ratzinger continues, the prophetic message of Fatima announced a century of martyrs, of World Wars, and of the Church suffering along man, especially in the figure of the Pope, and uniting her sorrow and the pains of the whole world to the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. This, at least, seemed to have been the interpretation of Ratzinger and John Paul II.

In thanksgiving for his survival, which he attributed to an intervention of Mary, the Pope visited Fatima exactly a year after he was shot. He gave the bullet fired by Ali Agca to the Bishop of Leiria who placed it in the crown of the statue of the Virgin Mary in the sanctuary of Fatima. At the same time, John Paul II became increasingly proactive for heeding the requests made by Mary at Fatima. Hence, soon after his recovery, he pronounced, first alone and later in spiritual union with the bishops of the world, the consecration of the entire world, and “especially the peoples whose consecration and

entrustment by us you are awaiting” to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.<sup>155</sup> The 1984 consecration which has been the one recognized as valid by Sister Lucia was providentially pronounced on the day of the Jubilee of the Family. In the 1982 consecration, which was made by the Pope at Fatima, we also hear the echoes of major concerns of Marian apocalyptic movements. John Paul II asked Mary for liberation from different evils, in particular from nuclear war and from sins against human life from its conception to natural end. These were the main issues brought up by Fatima movements from Italy to America, and the Pope seemed to be on the same page.

Following the assassination attempt, John Paul II also had to take care of his newly created yet not publicly inaugurated Pontifical Council for the Family. Over a year after the *motu proprio*, on the feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary, the apostolic Constitution “*Magnum matrimonii sacramentum*” gave the Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, closely affiliated to the Council, its definitive juridical form. Section 8 announced that the Institute was now under the special patronage of Our Lady of Fatima. This now clearly stated link between Fatima and the Pontifical Institute for Marriage and the family gave the impetus to Cardinal Caffarra, whose beginnings at the Institute were difficult, for reaching out to Sister Lucia.

Cardinal Carlo Caffarra first spoke about the letter he received from Sister Lucia in 2008 in an interview for *La voce di Padre Pio*, but the news was shared more broadly as he repeated the story at the Rome Life Forum in 2017. He explained that after a difficult beginning in his role as president of the Pontifical Institute for Marriage and the Family, he decided to send a letter asking for prayers to Sister Lucia. Not expecting an answer, he

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<sup>155</sup> John Paul II, “Act of Entrustment of the world to Mary, March 25, 1984,” *Vatican*. It is highly likely that Russia was not mentioned by name for diplomatic reasons.

was surprised to receive an encouraging handwritten letter from the nun who allegedly ended with these words:

Father, a time will come when the decisive battle between the kingdom of Christ and Satan will be over marriage and the family. And those who will work for the good of the family will experience persecution and tribulation (because this is the decisive issue.)<sup>156</sup> But do not be afraid, because Our Lady has already crushed his head. (Sister Lucia according to Caffarra)

During an interview on the same topic in 2017, Carlo Caffarra argued that the originality of Fatima consisted in its prophetic message, as opposed to other apparitions where Mary limits herself to exhortations. For him, Sister Lucia's divine mission was to transmit and interpret these prophecies, as she did in her letter. Caffarra ended by stating that he believed that the prophecy about the "decisive battle" was being fulfilled today.

In the 2008 interview, Carlo Caffarra interpreted both Sister Lucia's prophetic words and John Paul II's pontificate to be one and the same message:

Talking also to John Paul II, you felt too that this was the crux, as it touches the very pillar of creation, the truth of the relationship between man and woman among the generations. If the founding pillar is touched the entire building collapses and we see this now, because we are at this point and we know it. (Caffarra 2008)

We cannot deny that John Paul II sometimes expressed an apocalyptic sense of urgency, referring for example to the "'apocalypse' of our century"<sup>157</sup> or the "quasi apocalyptic threats"<sup>158</sup> hovering over humanity. Furthermore, it seems that this apocalyptic sentiment was more vividly felt in relation to the dignity of the human person, as it is especially preserved and taught in marriage and the family. Caffarra's interpretation did in fact become influential in many Marian apocalyptic circles, as numberless magazines and blog

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<sup>156</sup> What is in parenthesis is mentioned by Caffarra in the 2008 interview but not in the 2017 interventions. Considering that the letter was given to the Pontifical Institute's Archives where it has been lost, it is impossible to find its exact content as of now. However, Carlo Caffarra has « given sworn testimony of what the letter said. » reports *Aleteia* in the course of its exclusive interview of the Cardinal.

<sup>157</sup> John Paul II, *Gift & Mystery*, p.30.

<sup>158</sup> John Paul II, "Homily at Fatima on May 13, 1982," *Vatican*.

articles relayed the words addressed to Caffarra by Sister Lucia. We may wonder if this staunchly Marian apocalyptic direction given to the Pontifical Institute may not have caused its demise as Pope Francis replaced it with the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life in 2016. Indeed, this Marian apocalyptic attitude was probably partly behind Caffarra's participation in the *dubia* concerning Francis' *Amoris laetitia*. Interestingly, we see that the attitude which understands Mary's message at Fatima in apocalyptic terms, connecting it in particular with contemporary events such as communism and the sexual revolution, is not equally adopted and promoted by Catholics. Unlike Marian apocalyptic devotees, some Catholics prefer to shape their response to contemporary issues without reference to Marian apparitions while others do not necessarily see the present situation as one of critical danger and heightening cosmic battle.

#### 4) The Synod on the Family and *Familiaris consortio*

While we have previously seen the philosophical defense of sexual ethics in *Love and Responsibility* and the theological and biblical foundation behind the dignity of the person and the meaning of sexuality in the *Theology of the Body*, we now come to pastoral issues and propositions with *Familiaris consortio*. Only a few months after recovering from the assassination attempt against his life, John Paul II published *Familiaris consortio*, an Apostolic Exhortation following the Synod on the Family held in 1980. After months in and out of the hospital, one of the main wishes of John Paul II was, once more, to defend marriage and family, in spite of ill health. Later, we will see that, for him, even the simple offering of his physical suffering was a way to defend marriage and the family. Conveniently timed, *Familiaris consortio* was then entrusted for study to the newly



founded Pontifical Institute for the Study of Marriage and the Family. Much less theoretical, this exhortation allows John Paul II to make practical judgments on the situation of marriage and the family within the contemporary Church and world. What was left unsaid in his previous works as Pope regarding, for example, the repercussions of Catholic beliefs in matters of sexual ethics, is now underlined along with the questions it raises concerning current political issues.

In this section, we will try to pinpoint similarities with a Marian apocalyptic attitude towards marriage and the family while briefly summarizing the work, which is constituted of four large parts: 1) Bright Spots and Shadows for the Family Today, 2) The Plan of God for Marriage and the Family, 3) The Role of the Christian Family, 4) Pastoral Care of the Family: Stages, Structures, Agents and Situations. Within only the introduction, we already find the acknowledgment that this is indeed a special time of struggle for marriage and the family:

At a moment in history in which the family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it, and aware that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family, the Church perceives in a more urgent and compelling way her mission of proclaiming to all people the plan of God for marriage and the family, ensuring their full vitality and human and Christian development, and thus contributing to the renewal of society and of the People of God. (John Paul II 1982, §3)

John Paul II clearly starts his text by presenting marriage and the family as institutions which are threatened, particularly now, and yet which are crucial for the life of both society and Church, thus making the task of defending them an urgent necessity. He continues:

Not infrequently ideas and solutions which are very appealing but which obscure in varying degrees the truth and the dignity of the human person, are offered to the men and women of today, in their sincere and deep search for a response to the important daily problems that affect their married and family life. These views are often supported by the powerful and pervasive organization of the means of social communication, which subtly endanger freedom and the capacity for objective judgment. (John Paul II 1982, §4)

Emphasizing the dangers which marriage and the family face in present days, John Paul II affirms that there is a “powerful and pervasive” force at work in trying to cunningly corrupt what he, and the Catholic Church more largely, understand to be the objective truth regarding marriage and the family. There again, we sense a great awareness of living amidst a spiritual battle which tends to become intensified as human history progresses. Yet, as is usually the case with John Paul II, this apocalyptic sentiment is nuanced by the recognition that there are also positive advancements for contemporary couples and families. Among others, he cites “a more lively awareness of personal freedom and greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage, to promoting the dignity of women, to responsible procreation.”<sup>159</sup> To those who would like to think that the Pope is backward-looking, preferring everything as it was before, he answers that there are current advances very much worth considering.

The signs of degradation of marriage and the family, such as, “the growing number of divorces, the scourge of abortion; (...) the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality,” are all, according to John Paul II, rooted in “a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God’s plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one’s own selfish well-being.”<sup>160</sup> This critique of the modern secular understanding of freedom will be continued in *Veritatis splendor* and one of the remedies which will often be presented, along with intellectual rigor, will be Marian consecration, a prayerful act in which one asserts their freedom through voluntary self-giving in love, with Mary as model.

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<sup>159</sup> John Paul II, “*Familiaris consortio*,” *Vatican*, §6.

<sup>160</sup> John Paul II, “*Familiaris consortio*,” *Vatican*, §6.

##### 5) The Marian Year: *Redemptoris Mater* and *Mulieris dignitatem*

On the Feast of Pentecost of 1987, John Paul II proclaimed the second Marian Year in the history of the Church. This celebration was explicitly eschatological as it was meant to begin the official preparation of the Catholic Church for entering in the third millennium, while also revealing John Paul II's belief that "the 'fullness of time' manifests the extraordinary dignity of the 'woman.'"<sup>161</sup> During this time consecrated to Mary, John Paul II issued his most complete Mariological work: *Redemptoris Mater*, along with a reflection on women and femininity, *Mulieris dignitatem*. While we have already looked at the eschatological and personalistic aspects of *Redemptoris Mater* in Chapter 2, we now wish to stress another element, namely its contribution with *Mulieris dignitatem* in expressing John Paul II's New Feminism.

In the first sentence of his apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, John Paul II recognized that "the dignity and the vocation of women – a subject of constant human and Christian reflection – have gained exceptional prominence in recent years." Reminding the audience of what he had mentioned in *Familiaris consortio*, he praised the fact that the contemporary world bore "greater attention (...) to promoting the dignity of women."<sup>162</sup> Faithful once more to the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II's attitude was one of listening to what the world had to say while not compromising what the Church had handed on. Thus, he did not usually discard an entire ideology or movement without recognizing some good in it, whether it was the reaction to a real issue or a partial acknowledgment of some truth. Such an attitude requires much attention, time, and discernment, qualities

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<sup>161</sup> John Paul II, "*Mulieris dignitatem*," *Vatican*, §4.

<sup>162</sup> John Paul II, "*Familiaris consortio*," *Vatican*, §6.

which were not always demonstrated in Marian apocalyptic movements. However, John Paul II tried to encourage such devotees not to throw out the baby with the bath water.

While John Paul II shared and perhaps even deepened some basic principles with feminism, such as the fact that “the woman cannot become the ‘object’ of ‘domination’ and male ‘possession,’”<sup>163</sup> he always traced those ideas back to the Bible and the Christian tradition, from Eve to Mary Magdalene, affirming with Paul VI that:

Within Christianity, more than in any other religion, and since its very beginning, women have had a special dignity, of which the New Testament shows us many important aspects...; it is evident that women are meant to form part of the living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not all their potentialities have yet been made clear. (Paul VI, December 6, 1976)

However, John Paul II was also a fierce opponent of various propositions which often came with the Women’s Movement, including the rejection of motherhood through contraception and abortion, and what he called the ‘masculinization’ of women. He explained that “in the name of liberation from male ‘domination,’ women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality.’”<sup>164</sup> Instead of accepting false solutions to very real issues, the Pope sought to promote a ‘new feminism’ anchored in the principle of complementarity between men and women, as he had developed it in the *Theology of the Body*, and in his personalist philosophy.<sup>165</sup> More precisely, he emphasized that “*a woman is strong because of her awareness of this entrusting*, strong because of the fact that God ‘entrusts the human being to her,’ always and in every way, even in the situations of social discrimination in which she may find herself.”<sup>166</sup> This mystery of what he called the feminine ‘genius’ in that same section, and which he avoided essentializing,

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<sup>163</sup> John Paul II, “*Mulieris dignitatem*,” *Vatican*, §10.

<sup>164</sup> John Paul II, “*Mulieris dignitatem*,” *Vatican*, §10.

<sup>165</sup> John Paul II, “*Mulieris dignitatem*,” *Vatican*, §24.

<sup>166</sup> John Paul II, “*Mulieris dignitatem*,” *Vatican*, §30.

is at the root of the diverse vocations of women, from mother to nun to political leader or philosopher.<sup>167</sup>

As early as the second paragraph of *Mulieris dignitatem*, the Pope brings back our attention to “the ‘woman’ of the Bible,” Mary. It should not surprise us, considering John Paul II’s Marian devotion, that Mary is mentioned throughout this apostolic letter. What is particularly significant to our investigation is that it seems to be in Mariology that John Paul II finds the resources for responding to the sexual revolution and to the feminist movement. With Mary, he asserts that “a woman is to be found *at the centre of this salvific event*. The self-revelation of God, who is the inscrutable unity of the Trinity, is outlined *in the Annunciation at Nazareth*.”<sup>168</sup> Continuing his meditation, the Pope links the vocation to motherhood of millions of women with the heart of his Mariology, that is, the divine motherhood of Mary, the Theotokos.<sup>169</sup> About this, he writes:

the “*fullness of grace*” that was granted to the Virgin of Nazareth, with a view to the fact that she would become “*Theotókos*”, *also signifies the fullness of the perfection of* what is characteristic of woman”, of “*what is feminine*”. Here we find ourselves, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of women. (John Paul II 1988, §5)

John Paul II reasserts through his Christocentric Mariology what he had helped promulgate in section 22 of *Gaudium et spes*, namely that “only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.” It is in Mary, who *is* relation to Christ, that all human beings, but in a particular way women, can find the meaning of their existence in relation to Christ.

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<sup>167</sup> The examples of ‘perfect’ women mentioned by John Paul II are: “Monica, the mother of Augustine, Macrina, Olga of Kiev, Matilda of Tuscany, Hedwig of Silesia, Jadwiga of Cracow, Elizabeth of Thuringia, Birgitta of Sweden, Joan of Arc, Rose of Lima, Elizabeth Ann Seton and Mary Ward” (*Mulieris dignitatem*, §27), and he also canonized women such as Edith Stein, Mother Theresa, and Gianna Beretta Molla for instance.

<sup>168</sup> John Paul II, “*Mulieris dignitatem*,” *Vatican*, §3.

<sup>169</sup> John Paul II, “*Mulieris dignitatem*,” *Vatican*, §4.

Through the study of the Protoevangelium (in Genesis 3) and its interpretation by the Early Church Fathers (especially in the line of Irenaeus), John Paul II expands on the role of Mary as the New Eve, undoing by her obedience the knot which Eve had tied through her disobedience to God's command in the Garden of Eden. This theological attitude built upon Pius XII's encyclical *Ad caeli Reginam*, which proclaimed, during the first Marian Year in history, the queenship of Mary with a new feast day. In fact, in sections 38 and 39, we see Pius XII justifying the Marian title of Queen and declaring that Mary's share in the royal dignity of her Son gives her "the right to dispose of the treasures of the Divine Redeemer's Kingdom." This idea develops the special role of Mary as Queen Mother in the redemption and reordering of the world, until its final judgment. It also reiterates the intuition of Montfort when emphasizing the power of Marian consecration, namely that Mary, being the eschatological icon of what total consecration to Christ means, is the most powerful mediatrix and sovereign for those who desire to consecrate, like her, their life to her Son. Mary is queen because she is radically consecrated to Christ. She is the personal archetype of the reign of Christ and it is by letting her Son rule over her most completely that she becomes queen of the world. Going back to John Paul II, we see that this line of thought is applied to a very practical issue: the anthropological questionings taking place in the end of the twentieth century regarding the human person and the meaning of sexuality. If Mary has been handed special authority for the reordering of creation, then it is *through her* that everyone can find answers to the disorders and difficulties affecting them, especially in anthropological terms, for she has been entrusted with the Christ who restored man to himself. This it seems, gave John Paul II the theoretical

justification for finding in Mary the proper answer to the cultural shift happening in matters of identity, sexuality, and gender roles.

6) The United Nations, New Feminism, and the Culture of Life (1994-1995)

With the fall of the USSR during the beginning of the 90s, the Church focus on the protection of human dignity through marriage and the family intensified. Indeed, another dimension of John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family was his commitment to promote life, in the fruitfulness of the conjugal union, in the mother's womb, or in the suffering of the elderly. The Catholic Church's opposition to contraception, abortion, and euthanasia, which had been entrenched by *Humanae vitae*, was now spearheaded by John Paul II who gave it a renewed Marian apocalyptic character. This crystallized in the years 1994-1995, especially with the Pope's *Letter to Families* (February 2, 1994), the International Cairo Conference on Population and Development organized by the UN (5-13 September 1994), John Paul II's *Evangelium vitae* (25 March 1995) and *Letter to Women* (June 29, 1995), and finally the World Conference on Women (4-15 September 1995).

The United Nations proclaimed 1994 to be the International Year of the Family. This emphasis on the importance of the family was greatly appreciated by John Paul II who announced: "nella Chiesa e nella società *questa è l'ora della famiglia*."<sup>170</sup> Applauding the enterprise, John Paul II published a *Letter to Families*, entitled *Gratissimam sane*. For the Church, the year was inaugurated on the Feast of the Holy Family, December 26, 1993, and it was, as so many other initiatives of John Paul II, openly oriented towards the Great

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<sup>170</sup> John Paul II, "Discorso nel corso dell'incontro mondiale con le famiglie, 8 ottobre 1994," *Vatican*, §6. "In the Church and in society, now is the hour of the family." Translation is mine.

Jubilee of the Year 2000.<sup>171</sup> It begun by going broadly over what had been said in *Gaudium et spes*, *Familiaris consortio*, and the *Theology of the Body* in terms of nuptiality and the personal gift of self. It emphasized the family's central role in the protection of life: "The family is indeed—more than any other human reality— the place where an individual can exist 'for himself' through the sincere gift of self. This is why it remains a social institution which neither can nor should be replaced: it is the 'sanctuary of life.'"<sup>172</sup> Contrasting it with the 'civilization of love,' the Pope called out "certain modern 'cultural agendas'" which supported the 'anti-civilization' of positivism, utilitarianism, individualism, and moral relativism, and which theoretical framework he had addressed a year prior in *Veritatis splendor*.<sup>173</sup> Overall, key propositions of the sexual revolution were met with unprecedentedly harsh words from the Pope:

*Opposed to the civilization of love* is certainly the phenomenon of so-called "*free love*"; this is particularly dangerous because it is usually suggested as a way of following one's "real" feelings, but it is in fact destructive of love. How many families have been ruined because of "free love"! To follow in every instance a "real" emotional impulse by invoking a love "liberated" from all conditionings, means nothing more than to make the individual a slave to those human instincts which Saint Thomas calls "passions of the soul". "Free love" exploits human weaknesses; it gives them a certain "veneer" of respectability with the help of seduction and the blessing of public opinion. In this way there is an attempt to "soothe" consciences by creating a "moral alibi". But not all of the consequences are taken into consideration, especially when the ones who end up paying are, apart from the other spouse, the children, deprived of a father or mother and condemned to be in fact *orphans of living parents*. (John Paul II 1994, §14)

The moral permissiveness which, in the mind of John Paul II, is advertised by mass-media and public opinion, was called "a superficial and false modernity" as opposed to the true progressive dimension of Catholic doctrine.<sup>174</sup> Further on, the Pope reminds families of

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<sup>171</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to Families," *Vatican*, §3.

<sup>172</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to Families," *Vatican*, §11.

<sup>173</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to Families," *Vatican*, §13.

<sup>174</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to Families," *Vatican*, §17.



their nature as an eschatological sign of the union of Christ with the Church and, right after, presents an entire section on Mary.

In this part of the text, John Paul II contrasts the beauty of the Incarnation of Christ and of Mary, whom he calls “Mother of Fairest Love,” with the violent and pornographic anti-culture propagated by mass media.<sup>175</sup> This reflection upon modernity in its diverse shapes, especially upon modern technology and means of communication as they relate to the wider culture, is also a central theme of Marian apocalyptic movements, which have at once mastered the use of social media while being staunch critics of their noxious impact on civilization. Finally, John Paul II’s apocalyptic sentiments towards the threats against the family and the promotion of life are made clear in section §21, where he asserts that the dangers which immediately surrounded the birth of Christ spoke with “prophetic eloquence” on the evils at work against the “civilization of death.” Evoking the legalization of abortion in several countries, he proposes that such an attitude constitutes a sort of anti-*Ave Maria*: “If an individual is exclusively concerned with “use”, he can reach the point of killing love by killing the fruit of love. For the culture of use, the “blessed fruit of your womb” (*Lk* 1:42) becomes in a certain sense an “accursed fruit.”” Hence, we witness the figure of Mary, as she relates to her Son, being used by John Paul II as the focal point through which to frame his critic of the cultural revolution and its consequences.

Soon after his *Letter to Families*, John Paul II, in a pastoral visit to the Roman parish of Santa Maria Madre dell’Ospitalità, strongly reiterates similar Marian apocalyptic sentiments regarding the preparatory orientation of the Cairo Conference. He ends his discourse explaining that he returned to Rome to pray the *Regina Coeli*, a Marian prayer

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<sup>175</sup> John Paul II, “Letter to Families,” *Vatican*, §20.

during Eastertide, and “to combat a program, a project made by the United Nations, who want to destroy the family.” He then exclaims, in a tone less diplomatic than usual: “My God! United Nations! I simply say: think twice, repent! If you are the United Nations, you cannot divide, destroy!”<sup>176</sup> During the *Regina Coeli* of that same day, he again shares his interrogations and worries and concludes by entrusting them to the “motherly heart of Mary,” whose devotion is so specifically tied to the message of Our Lady of Fatima, who asserted: “in the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph.”

A year after the Cairo Conference, where the Holy See expressed a “general reservation” regarding the chapter on so-called reproductive rights, which praised the increasing availability of contraception and advocated for the reduction of the number of children per family in developing countries,<sup>177</sup> the International Women Conference took place in Beijing. Before the Beijing Conference, John Paul II wrote a *Letter to Women*, expressing both his “deep appreciation to the United Nations Organization for having sponsored this very significant event,” and exploring similar themes already mentioned in his letter to the secretary general of the conference, Gertrude Mongella, on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1995. In this *Letter to Women*, the Pope began by thanking women, “women who are mothers, (...) wives, (...) daughters, (...) sisters, (...) who work, (...) consecrated women, (...) every woman.”<sup>178</sup> He then expressed his sadness regarding the historical conditioning which has impeded “the progress of women” and obscured “the dignity which women have always possessed according to God’s plan.” In particular, John Paul II voiced his sorrow at

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<sup>176</sup> John Paul II, “Discorso di Giovanni Paolo II, 17 aprile 1994,” *Vatican*. Translation is mine.

<sup>177</sup> UNFPA, “Program of Action,” *UNFPA*, §7.13. In its written statement on the matter, reported on pages 161-164 of the Program of Action, the Holy See further explains its reservations, generally linked to an ambiguous use of terms such as “reproductive health” and “family planning.”

<sup>178</sup> John Paul II, “Letter to Women,” *Vatican*, §2.

the members of the Church who had perpetuated such injustices. Thus, the Pope's attitude in the face of feminism and the sexual revolution was not just one of blame. Nonetheless, instead of promoting a sterile feminism, John Paul II entrusted women specifically with the task of building a 'culture of life,' for "perhaps more than men, women *acknowledge the person*, because they see persons with their hearts. They see them independently of various ideological or political systems."<sup>179</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Beijing Conference was a similar source of concern and reservation on behalf of the Holy See as the Cairo Conference had been. This dissatisfaction was most likely anticipated, which could explain the vehemence with which John Paul II developed his new feminism, built upon the promotion of the sanctity of life from its conception to its natural end, and the understanding of sexuality as a fruitful gift, sign, and mystery instead of something to manipulate or deny.

On the first day of the year 1995, the Pope issued a message for the World Day of Peace, entitled "Women: Teachers of Peace." There, he repeated that because God "entrusts the human being in a special way" to women,<sup>180</sup> they have a special call to help building a civilization which respects the human person, from which true peace comes. He also, as per usual, called onto "Mary, Queen of Peace, (who) is close to the women of our day because of her motherhood, her example of openness to others' needs and her witness of suffering." In fact, the Pope argued,

while the 1994 International Year of the Family focused attention on women as mothers, the Beijing Conference, which has as its theme 'Action for Equality, Development and Peace,' provides an auspicious occasion for heightening awareness of the many contributions made by women to the life of whole societies and nations. (John Paul II June 29, 1995, §8)

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<sup>179</sup> John Paul II, "Letter to Women," *Vatican*, §12.

<sup>180</sup> John Paul II, "*Mulieris dignitatem*," *Vatican*, §30.

For John Paul II, the “genius of women,” which he understood in personalistic terms, was to be shared not only at home and at church but also in the workplace, in academia, in laboratories, and in the government. In sections 10-11 of the “Letter to Women,” he assimilated this active participation of women in the world with Mary’s queenship. He wrote: “For (Mary), ‘to reign’ is to serve! Her service is ‘to reign!’ This is the way in which authority needs to be understood, both in the family and in society and the Church.” Thus, Mary’s intervention in human history, manifested eloquently during her apparitions, can become an inspiration or a call for women to become publicly invested in the fight for the promotion of human dignity. We can also infer from the constant reference to Mary as model of women that John Paul II’s hope that women would come to play a greater role in public life in the third millennium<sup>181</sup> may constitute a sign of the expected Marian Age. Interestingly, this seems to point to a specifically prophetic dimension which John Paul II attributes to women through Mary. As Mary is particularly active through the increasing number of her apparitions, so in John Paul II’s new feminism, women are called to become increasingly present in the fight for life. We will come back to this idea shortly.

*Evangelium vitae* gave an opportunity to John Paul II to explain his new feminism, oriented towards the protection of life, and the Catholic Church’s response to the sexual revolution whose ideals were now so widely promoted by influential sectors within powerful institutions such as the United Nations. While proponents of the sexual revolution spent a lot of energy securing women’s ‘reproductive rights,’ an umbrella term referring to access to contraception and abortion, John Paul II denounced the “contraceptive mentality” which leads to a “culture of death.”<sup>182</sup> In fact, while civilizations have always suffered

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<sup>181</sup> John Paul II, “Letter to Mrs. Gertrude Mongella,” *Vatican*, §5.

<sup>182</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §12-13.

through “the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger, endemic diseases, violence and war,”

John Paul II affirmed that “a new cultural climate is developing” in that:

broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems. (John Paul II March 25, 1995, §4)

This phenomenon, for the Pope, signified the rise of a culture of death, diametrically opposed to the message of Christ, for it constitutes “a concession to the ‘thinking’ of the evil one, the one who ‘was a murderer from the beginning’ (Jn 8:44).”<sup>183</sup>

Reading the movement towards a culture of death in the light of the Bible, John Paul II framed his encyclical in explicitly apocalyptic terms, speaking of a “conspiracy against life” promulgated by powerful mass media and global institutions<sup>184</sup> responsible for creating “structures of sin.”<sup>185</sup> While he makes implicit mention of the totalitarianisms and World Wars of the twentieth century, he claims that greater evils are now threatening human dignity. Tracing such new threats back to moral relativism, secularism,<sup>186</sup> sexual permissiveness,<sup>187</sup> hedonism, materialism, utilitarianism, and an individualistic view of freedom,<sup>188</sup> John Paul II accuses in fact much of the foundations on which the sexual revolution was erected. Moreover, the Pope seems to understand the culture of death of his day in continuity with the totalitarian states of the twentieth century as he speaks of a type of democracy which can become “a tyrant State, which arrogates to itself the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenceless members, from the unborn child to

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<sup>183</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §8.

<sup>184</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §17.

<sup>185</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §12.

<sup>186</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §20-21.

<sup>187</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §59.

<sup>188</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §23.

the elderly, in the name of a public interest which is really nothing but the interest of one part.”<sup>189</sup> As with the shift in Marian apocalyptic movements with the shift from an anti-communist narrative to a militant defense of Catholic teachings regarding marriage and the family, John Paul II does not hesitate to speak of the consequences of the cultural revolution in Western democracies in terms of a new form of totalitarianism.<sup>190</sup> He seems to imply that “the errors of Russia,” which are rooted in the age-old denial of God and of human dignity, have in fact spread.

As we have tried to show throughout this work, John Paul II’s apocalyptic thinking never steers far from his Mariology. On several occasions throughout *Evangelium vitae*, he touches on the importance of Mary: as the Woman of the Visitation,<sup>191</sup> as “Mother of Life” and model of the Church,<sup>192</sup> and as the Woman of the Apocalypse.<sup>193</sup> In this encyclical, the Pope unfolds the prophetic mission of Mary, sign of the prophetic mission of all women, as profoundly personalist:

A mother welcomes and carries in herself another human being, enabling it to grow inside her, giving it room, respecting it in its otherness. Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health. This is the fundamental contribution which the Church and humanity expect from women. And it is the indispensable prerequisite for an authentic cultural change. (John Paul II March 25, 1995, §99)

This understanding of women as divinely appointed teachers of the inherent dignity of the person is what John Paul II proposes as a new feminism, standing in contrast to the feminism of the sexual revolution based on “self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of

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<sup>189</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §20, §70.

<sup>190</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §20, §96.

<sup>191</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §45.

<sup>192</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §102.

<sup>193</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §103-104.

personal desires and instincts.”<sup>194</sup> Through this argument, the Pope underlines the Mariological character of Catholic eschatology and the importance of women in the life of the Church, Mary being both model of women and model of the Church. This Marian mission however is met by great adversity because of the very fact that it is prophetic. With the Marian image of the Woman of the Apocalypse in Revelation 12, John Paul II argues that “the hostility of the powers of evil is, in fact, an insidious opposition which, before affecting the disciples of Jesus, is directed against his mother.”<sup>195</sup> Mary becomes a sign both of victory and of struggle, an example and a helper, “the bright dawn of the new world,”<sup>196</sup> who appears amid the darkest night while announcing the brightest light to come.

#### 7) “The Holy Father will have much to suffer:” victim for the family

We have tried to demonstrate that John Paul II’s defense of marriage and the family is distinctly Marian apocalyptic in so far as the fight against the sexual revolution is presented in continuity with the fight against communism, while Mary is at once a model of femininity, a prophetic sign of the cosmic battle between good and evil that is meant to culminate in the apocalypse, and an active agent of the preparation for the reign of Christ over the world. However, we can add to this picture another Marian apocalyptic dimension especially related to Fatima, namely the importance given to suffering.

The message of Fatima, and of modern Marian apparitions which follow similar patterns, emphasizes the significance of suffering as a means to participate in the

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<sup>194</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §23.

<sup>195</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §104.

<sup>196</sup> John Paul II, “*Evangelium vitae*,” *Vatican*, §105.

redemptive work of Christ. To illustrate this, it will suffice to quote three words spoken to the three shepherds by an accompanying angel: “Penance, Penance, Penance!” The little seers of Fatima took these words of repentance to heart and practiced many sacrificial acts such as not drinking water on a hot day or giving away their food, offering their sufferings for the conversion of sinners. Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued an official commentary on the secret of Fatima asserting that:

the vision of the third part of the «secret», so distressing at first, concludes with an image of hope: no suffering is in vain, and it is a suffering Church, a Church of martyrs, which becomes a sign-post for man in his search for God. (...) There is something more: from the suffering of the witnesses there comes a purifying and renewing power, because their suffering is the actualization of the suffering of Christ himself and a communication in the here and now of its saving effect. (Ratzinger)

This message of redemptive suffering was always emphasized by John Paul II, especially with his apostolic letter *Salvifici doloris* issued in 1984, the same year as his consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A decade later, in section 15 of *Evangelium vitae*, he reiterated his belief in the necessity to grasp the redemptive meaning of suffering instead of seeing it as “the epitome of evil, to be eliminated at all costs.”

Evidently, the link between Mary and the Catholic notion of redemptive suffering does not emerge with John Paul II. It began with the Mariological concept of the conscious spiritual participation of Mary in the sacrifice of her Son, as we have suggested in our first chapter, and was reaffirmed with the Second Vatican Council with *Lumen gentium*, as we have seen in our second chapter. However, it is also a key component of Marian apparitional spirituality, as Sandra Zimdars-Swartz noted:

The motif of suffering is pervasive in most modern Marian apparitions. Its manifestations range from the suffering of the mother who appears and voices her laments, sometimes with tears, to the suffering both before and after her appearances of those who bear her messages, to the suffering of the many people, finally, who are drawn to these appearances and messages. (Zimdars-Swartz, p266)



Interestingly, John Paul II applies this narrative of redemptive suffering to his defense of marriage and the family. In the year of the Cairo Conference, this International Year of the Family, when John Paul II was once more suffering from ill health, he proclaimed:

And I understood that I must introduce the Church of Christ into this Third Millennium with prayer, with various initiatives, but I saw that it was not enough: it had to be introduced with suffering, with the attack of thirteen years ago and with this new sacrifice. Why now, why in this year, why in this Year of the Family? Precisely because the family is threatened, the family is attacked. The Pope must be attacked, the Pope must suffer, so that every family and the world can see that there is a Gospel, I would say, superior: the Gospel of suffering, with which the future must be prepared, the third millennium of families, of every family and of all families. I wanted to add these reflections in my first meeting with you, dear Romans and pilgrims, at the end of this Marian month, because I owe this gift of suffering, and I give thanks for it, to the Most Holy Virgin. I understand that it was important to have this argument before the powerful of the world. Again I must meet these powerful of the world and I must speak. With what arguments? I still have this argument of suffering. And I would like to say to them: understand it, understand why the Pope was again in the hospital, again in suffering, understand it, think about it again! (John Paul II, May 29th, 1994)

In these remarks, John Paul II ties many things together: the assassination attempt on the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima, the mission of Mary in teaching the redemptive role of suffering, the importance of suffering for the urgent defense of the family in the face of the powers of this world, and the ever-present orientation of John Paul II towards the third millennium. Another line from John Paul II summarizes his Marian apocalyptic approach to redemptive suffering in even fewer words: “Mary does not triumph with a sword in Her hand, but with a sword in Her heart.”<sup>197</sup> As Christ’s sufferings brought salvation to the world, so Mary’s pains, united with her Son’s, become the childbirth pangs through which she gives birth to the Body of Christ, the Church. As Jacinta and the other seers of Fatima spent hot days without drinking water or tied a tight rope around their waist to accompany

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<sup>197</sup> John Paul II, *In God’s Hands: the Spiritual Diaries of Pope St John Paul II*, p.416.

their prayers with penances, so John Paul II saw the *via dolorosa* of Fatima's "Bishop dressed in white" as an image of what he should be, suffering for the salvation of the world and especially for the family and with the family.

#### 8) Marian interventionism, Montfortian apocalypticism, and the Third Millennium

John Paul II's Marian apocalypticism culminates against the backdrop of the third millennium. Hence, it is crucial for us to return to how he approaches this new millennium and why it stands as a "hermeneutical key" to read his entire pontificate. In *Tertio millennio adveniente*, published in 1994, the Pope clarifies his position. First, his focus is decisively Christocentric: the third millennium derives its importance from the fact that it is the 2000 years anniversary of the Incarnation of Jesus in the womb of Mary. From the Incarnation onward, John Paul II asserts, it is "'the last days (cf. Heb 1:2), the 'last hour' (cf. 1 Jn 2:18), and the time of the Church, which will last until the Parousia.'"<sup>198</sup> While it is definitely oriented towards the end of this world, human history understood in Catholic terms is more importantly directed towards its fulfillment in the Coming of Christ. Thus, the entry in the third millennium is first and foremost a time of joy for Christians, a 'jubilee,'<sup>199</sup> and a time of prayerful discernment of the signs of the times with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>200</sup> John Paul II repeats on several occasions that it is not an opportunity to develop a new form of millenarianism.<sup>201</sup> Therefore, what we have called apocalypticism throughout this investigation of John Paul II's thought ought not to be misunderstood as a catastrophizing

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<sup>198</sup> John Paul II, "*Tertio millennio adveniente*," *Vatican*, §10.

<sup>199</sup> John Paul II, "*Tertio millennio adveniente*," *Vatican*, §16.

<sup>200</sup> John Paul II, "*Tertio millennio adveniente*," *Vatican*, §23.

<sup>201</sup> John Paul II, "*Tertio millennio adveniente*," *Vatican*, §23 and "*Novo millennio ineunte*," *Vatican*, §5.

pessimism nor as a too literal reading of the Book of Revelation which would stand against the traditional Catholic interpretation of the Bible.

John Paul II's Marian apocalypticism consists in a vivid awareness of the eschatological nature of the Christian faith which is ever-actualized through the archetypical figure of Mary, along with a strong commitment to read contemporary events in the light of the belief that we are living amidst a great cosmic battle between good and evil in which Christ has particularly invested his Mother with the capacity to extend his authority and power throughout the world until his Parousia. The significance which John Paul II gives to dedicated times such as the Marian Year or the Great Jubilee is derived from the potential of consecrated moments to become signs of the historical stages of salvation. It is not that the Pope is expecting the end of the world on year 2000, rather it is that this year lends a great opportunity for the Church to remind all nations of the meaning and end of history, which is found in Christ. The Marian apocalyptic emphasis on the presence and action of Mary in history is clearly inspired by Louis de Montfort whose Marian devotion is destined to be the preparation for the reign of Christ.<sup>202</sup> To prepare for the Great Jubilee, the Pope proposed three years to focus on each Divine Person of the Trinity. For each of these, Mary was also contemplated in relation to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>203</sup> The time leading to the year 2000 was thus lived as an Advent symbolizing at once the past Advent of the Incarnation and the future Advent of the Parousia. Mary was seen in a strictly Christocentric-Trinitarian manner and the Great Jubilee was presented as a sacramental time pointing to the 'now' and 'not yet' of Christian eschatology.

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<sup>202</sup> De Montfort, Louis, *Traité de la vraie dévotion à la Sainte Vierge*, §227.

<sup>203</sup> John Paul II, "Tertio millennio adveniente," *Vatican*, §43, §48, §54.

Undoubtedly influenced by Montfort regarding a prophetic Marian Age, the Pope appears to embody one of those “apostles of the end times,” who carries “the crucifix in the right hand, the rosary in the left, the sacred names of Jesus and Mary in their heart.”<sup>204</sup> In continuity with the history of Marian militancy, the message of numerous Marian apparitions and various Marian apocalyptic movements, the rosary is promoted by John Paul II as a weapon of choice through which to extend the reign of Christ. In *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, John Paul II promotes this popular form of prayer for two specific intentions inspired from his devotion to Fatima, namely peace and the family. While John Paul II proposes a new set of mysteries to add to the traditional meditations and encourages families in particular to pray the rosary, he quotes Patrick Peyton: “the family that prays together stays together.”<sup>205</sup> In fact, the founder of the widely broadcast Family Rosary Crusade, controversial for having been supported by the CIA for its anti-communist propaganda in South America, was a star of modern Marian apocalyptic movements.

John Paul II’s Marian apocalypticism is not solely Montfortian in so far as it is intrinsically linked to the defense of marriage and the family, something about which Montfort was practically silent. Interestingly, John Paul II sees a certain continuity from the Marian Year to the Great Jubilee of 2000, passing through the International Year of the Family. He writes: “The Marian Year was as it were an anticipation of the Jubilee, and contained much of what will find fuller expression in the Year 2000,”<sup>206</sup> and adds: “Each family, in some way, should be involved in the preparation for the Great Jubilee. Was it not through a family, the family of Nazareth, that the Son of God chose to enter into human

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<sup>204</sup> De Montfort, Louis, *Traité de la vraie dévotion à la Sainte Vierge*, §55-59.

<sup>205</sup> John Paul II, “*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*,” *Vatican*, §41.

<sup>206</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*,” *Vatican*, §26

history?”<sup>207</sup> Evoking the events which led to the demise of the USSR, John Paul II implies that there is a link with the Marian Year which preceded these events by a year: “it would be difficult not to recall that the Marian Year took place only shortly before the events of 1989.”<sup>208</sup> Once again, and in the line of Fatima, the fall of communism is related to Mary’s intervention. Finally, the Year of the Family is called to be “another significant stage in preparation for the Great Jubilee.”<sup>209</sup>

While John Paul II adopts a typical Montfortian spirituality by asserting that Mary is playing a great role in the preparation for the Second Coming of Christ as she had done for the birth of her Son two thousand years ago, he adds his own touch by implying that Christ not only comes through his mother but more broadly through the family. The originality of John Paul II’s Marian apocalypticism is his understanding that if Christ comes through his mother then he also comes through the family, without which there is no motherhood. Marriage and the family, and not solely Mary, thus become the sign of the Coming of Christ, both in the history of each individual and in the larger destiny of humanity. The tribulations through which the family is allegedly going through find their prefiguration in the suffering of Christ and of Mary. Consequently, for John Paul II, to say that the family is in greater danger than ever before is also to recognize that the cosmic battle is rapidly intensifying.

#### D) Conclusion: the place of the family in John Paul II’s Marian apocalypticism

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<sup>207</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*,” *Vatican*, §28.

<sup>208</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*,” *Vatican*, §27.

<sup>209</sup> John Paul II, “*Tertio millennio adveniente*,” *Vatican*, §28.

In this long chapter, we have seen the practical beginnings of Karol Wojtyła's defense of marriage and the family, with his one-on-one pastoral counseling, marriage preparation, student chaplaincy, and outdoor trips. As he backed his 'in the trenches' style with a rigorous theoretical framework, we have seen both his philosophical anthropology and his artistic creativity be put to the use. Last but not least, we have surveyed the extent to which this mission occupied his energy, time, and words as Pope, notably with the *Theology of the Body*, *Familiaris consortio*, *Mulieris dignitatem*, and *Evangelium vitae*. More importantly, we have tried to point to the various ways in which his defense of marriage and the family was Marian apocalyptic: from repeated appeals to Mary as mother, queen, and active agent of history in all issues concerning sexual ethics and the family, to calling for the repentance of the United Nations and offering physical sufferings for this purpose, through seeing himself as a providential figure symbolically present in the visions of Fatima and meant to lead the Church into the new millennium. Finally, this investigation has allowed us to further define the originality of John Paul II's Marian apocalypticism which organically attributes a central role to the family in its eschatological worldview. As we have seen, this move is implicitly justified through the interconnecting of Mariology and Marian apparitions, personalism, the sexual revolution, new feminism, and the third millennium.

## V) Conclusion

To conclude, let us go back to our initial definition of Marian apocalypticism, where Wojcik posits Marian apparitions “as part of a divine plan unfolding in the last days, with predictions of an imminent eschatological battle between Mary and the forces of evil, identified variously as secularism, modernism, communism, and other perceived threats to the Church.”<sup>210</sup> In the first chapter, we attempted to frame Marian apocalypticism in Catholic terms, both historically and doctrinally. The first clarification made was that, in this work, Marian apocalypticism did not refer to millenarian or schismatic movements, although we acknowledged that such sentiments existed beyond the doctrinal confines of the Catholic Church. Additionally, by looking at traditionally approved narratives of Marian apparitions, we saw that the militant character of Marian apparitions went back to Antiquity and the Middle Ages, with events such as Our Lady of the Pillar and the Battle of Lepanto.

Furthermore, Louis de Montfort’s Mariology, particularly his concept of a “Marian Age” – an era immediately preceding the end times and characterized by a heightening sense of the presence of Mary supposed to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Christ in the same way as she had done for his first coming – gave further grounds for modern Marian apocalypticism to develop into what it is now: a collection of movements and proponents reaching tens of millions and mostly oriented, in the line of Fatima, towards the fight against perceived “errors of Russia” through the promotion of Marian devotion. By focusing on John Paul II, we found a Pope for whom both Montfort and Fatima were crucial parts of life. The former gave him his motto “*Totus tuus*,” the other gave him the

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<sup>210</sup> Wojcik, Daniel. “Marian Apocalypticism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, p.648.

opportunity to live by this motto, from nearing death during an assassination attempt to leading the Church into the third millennium through suffering.

In our second chapter, we tried to highlight the fact that John Paul II was not passively receiving Marian apocalyptic attitudes. On the contrary, it seems that after having been brought up in a context of Polish Marian devotion, he both consciously adopted and adapted Marian apocalypticism, although he never used the expression himself. His personalist approach to Mariology allowed him to anchor his practices, such as Marian consecration or the rosary, in a rigorous theological framework where Mary was understood as the perfect human person, the perfect woman, and the perfect mother. When he became Pope, his training in philosophy and his theological creativity in turn participated in shaping contemporary Marian apocalypticism, supporting its spirituality and argumentation with nuanced theoretical foundations. This impact can be observed for instance with the dozens of Marian apocalyptic movements which have taken John Paul II as their patron saint, and which extensively rely on his work for their ministry. Hence, we cannot speak of a unilateral influence of Marian apocalypticism on John Paul II. We must rather recognize that while Marian apocalypticism was absorbed extensively by John Paul II, he also nuanced, oriented, promoted, and reinforced contemporary Marian apocalyptic attitudes in return.

The third chapter was dedicated to exploring more directly the interactions between Marian apocalypticism and John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family. By chronologically reviewing the various stages of John Paul II's defense of marriage and the family, we were able to discern the primary importance of the apparitions of Fatima. From his life in occupied Poland to his speeches calling for the conversion of the United Nations,



we see a man who lived immersed in the Fatima narrative. In 1917 at Fatima, Portugal, Mary had expressed her desire for the conversion of Russia through consecration to her Immaculate Heart, warning that errors stemming from Russia would potentially spread throughout the world and lead the Pope to suffer much. Elements highlighting John Paul II's existential experience of the message of Fatima include his lifelong fight against communism, his emphasis on Marian consecration and his many acts of entrustment, his understanding of a "culture of death" promoted worldwide by powerful forces, and his valorization of suffering as participation in the redemptive suffering of Christ.

By focusing on John Paul II's development of a "new feminism" promoting a "culture of life" during the Marian Year of 1987-1988 and the years 1994-1995 of the Cairo and Beijing UN conferences, we were able to underline the originality of John Paul II's Marian apocalypticism. In fact, the Pope's conviction that women would and should play a greater role in culture and politics for the protection of the inherent dignity of life seems to coincide with the Montfortian expectation of an "Age of Mary." As the Pope presented Mary as the archetype of women by always relating his notion of "new feminism" to the Mother of God, especially on the grounds of a personalist approach to the "feminine genius," we find a new kind of Marian apocalypticism intrinsically connected to issues in matters of sexuality, marriage, and the family.

On the one hand, John Paul II seemed to view evil attacks against humanity as having to be fiercely directed against the family, which he called a "sanctuary of life," and against women specifically, as the bearers of life. On the other hand, he attributed to Mary and to women following in her footsteps a prophetic and preparatory role in the spread of

the reign of Christ who is “the way, and the truth, and the life.”<sup>211</sup> Overall, the Pope proposed an interpretation of Marian apocalypticism in which marriage and the family are seen as indicators and agents of the cosmic battle opposing Christ to the devil. When marriage and the family are perceived as increasingly threatened, their tribulations become of a sign of the end times, while when promoted as institutions of hope and evangelization, they are presented as prophetic signs of the reordering of the world according to God’s will. In both cases, Mary stands at the crossroads, as a theological resource to better understand the nature of marriage and the family, as a spiritual role model to inspire mothers and brides, as a mother actively protecting her children throughout the world, and as a queen participating in her son’s fight with the authority and power he has entrusted to her.

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<sup>211</sup> John 14:6.

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