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The Magnificat and the Poor in Asia-Oceania: An Exposition of Mary in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*¹

The Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* is Pope Benedict XVI's written response to the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome in October 2008 on the theme *The Word of God in the life and Mission of the Church*.² Besides an Introduction and a Conclusion, the document is divided into three sections. Part One is on *The Word of God*, Part Two on *The Word in the Church*, and Part Three on *The Word for the World*. Numbers 27 and 28 of the document cover the main section on Mary, the Mother of God.

In the following, after introductory comments on the document, I will present significant aspects of the Marian references in the text with a particular consideration of the Magnificat. Finally, on the basis of these considerations, although in a more selective approach, some concluding reflections relevant to the question of women and poverty in the Asian-Oceania context shall be mentioned.³

Introduction

The Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* opens with the significant statement of God as the God of dialogue, inviting humanity, each one of us, to enter into this dialogue and share in the love of the Holy Trinity:
“In reality, the Word of God, through whom “all things were made” (*Jn* 1:3) and who “became flesh” (*Jn* 1:14), is the same Word who is “in the beginning” (*Jn* 1:1). .. The Word exists before creation. Consequently at the heart of the divine life there is communion, there is absolute gift. “God is love” (*1 Jn* 4:16), as the same Apostle tells us elsewhere, thus pointing to “the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny.” God makes himself known to us as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters his Word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently the Word, who from the beginning is with God and is God, reveals God himself in the dialogue of love between the divine persons, and invites us to share in that love. Created in the image and likeness of the God who is love, we can thus understand ourselves only in accepting the Word and in docility to the work

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² Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html

³ The following is an abridged version of a paper given at the Second Asia Oceania Mariological Conference *Mary and the new Evangelization of Asia: A perspective of Human Development*, Manila, Philippines, 8-13 September 2011.

of the Holy Spirit. In the light of the revelation made by God's Word, the enigma of the human condition is definitively clarified."⁴

Humanity is thus offered the unsurpassing gift of divine friendship. It is the Church's mission to proclaim and to exemplify in life this good news, "the word of God as the saving truth which men and women in every age need to hear. For this reason, it must be explicitly proclaimed. The Church must go out to meet each person in the strength of the Spirit (cf. *1 Cor 2:5*) and continue her prophetic defense of people's right and freedom to hear the word of God, while constantly seeking out the most effective ways of proclaiming that word, even at the risk of persecution. The Church feels duty-bound to proclaim to every man and woman the word that saves (cf. *Rom 1:14*)."⁵

This proclamation can only be done on the basis of true *dialogue* which is rooted in genuine *empathy*, that uniquely human capacity which enables a person "to feel the experiences, needs, aspirations, frustrations, sorrows, joys, anxieties, hurt, or hunger of others as if they were his or her own."⁶ And the classical representation of this human capacity is given in the Mother of God, in whom we can see the truth about the Word and what it affects in us.

Verbum Domini 27-28: The significance of Mary

Although there are only few references to Mary in the document the significance of these references outweighs the brevity of text, for the document places the person of the Mother of God fairly centrally, in that she is shown as the one who listens and hears the Word (*verbum Dei*) and gives the appropriate response thus demonstrating the true ecclesial attitude (responding to the *verbum in ecclesia*) of the believer in and for the world (*verbum mundo*). Thus, the theology of the Word corresponds to a theology of discipleship, exemplified in the Mother of the Word, in her *responsive faith* and *active faithfulness*⁷ to the Word.

The written word of the text finds its paradigm in Mary; she is an explication of the *total and most authentic response to the Word*. And this marks her out as the true believer, as the example of true discipleship of Christ.⁸

Some aspects of this important theological theme shall be presented here while keeping in mind, that particularly in the Lucan work (Gospel and Acts) the exemplary exponent of this discipleship is Mary, the Mother of God.

Discipleship of Jesus presupposes the disciple's openness and readiness towards Jesus. This dialogue-relationship is established by divine initiative and human response. God must first of all speak or

⁴ *Verbum Domini* 6. Due to the scope of this paper, I will here not enter into a further exposition of the text of the document.

⁵ *Verbum Domini* 95.

⁶ Shelton, Charles, "Christian Empathy: The Psychological Foundation for Pastoral Ministry," *Chicago Studies* 23, 2 (1988): 209-222, here 210.

⁷ For the expressions *responsive faith* and *active faithfulness* I am indebted to Congar. See Y. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition* (Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster, 1966), 253-257.

manifest himself in some way if the disciple is to hear. Of equal importance is the disciple's response to what he/she has heard. The hearing of God's word must provoke a reaction in the disciple which radically alters his/her life. A temporary response is not sufficient - perseverance is necessary.

In the New Testament texts Mary is shown as the perfect example of *responsive faith*. In her shines forth the distinctive marks of the fully redeemed person –the *immaculata*–, the *new* person. This fully graced person is indeed both a “fully and perfectly redeemed person” and the “ideal of faith,” and thus is justly acclaimed as the “personal summit of the faithful. Redeeming grace was given to her in abundance, but it needed to be received in faith and lived out in obedience patterned on the *Fiat* of the Annunciation.”⁹ She welcomes and keeps the Word in her heart (Lk 2.19). “What is implied here is much more than mere remembering; it is a matter of *active faithfulness*. This is the living fidelity of a mind reflecting upon the meaning of what it has heard, drawing conclusions, trying to determine the boundaries between what is true and what is not.”¹⁰

Newman commenting on Luke's words "Mary kept all these things in her heart", points to the Mother of God as “our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it; not enough to possess, she uses it; not enough to assent, she develops it; not enough to submit the Reason, she reasons upon it; not indeed reasoning first, and believing afterwards, with Zacharias, yet first believing without reasoning, next from love and reverence, reasoning after believing. And thus she symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the doctors of the Church also, who have to investigate, and weigh, and define, as well to profess the Gospel; to draw the line between truth and heresy; to anticipate or remedy the various aberrations of wrong reason; to combat pride and recklessness with their own arms; and thus to triumph over the sophist and the innovator.”¹¹

This ties in well with Congar's point that “what is passed on is received by a living, active subject. If faith, the initial reality of salvation, is transmitted, it must also be received, actively received... every word or communication from one being to another needs to be received. A word is intended to make

8 By speaking of Mary as the model of true discipleship, it is not intended to place her among that particular group of Jesus' followers whom he called into his fellowship. There is no scriptural evidence of Mary as a disciple in that sense. However Luke mentions her at the centre of the group of followers of Jesus in the post-resurrection time.” As fellowship with Jesus Christ is founded in the hearing of the word of God, welcoming it joyfully, believing in it and acting upon it, it follows that, within the context of Luke's Gospel, Mary also fulfills the demands of Christian discipleship in that she *follows Jesus in undivided loyalty, which means detachment from all other allegiances and total allegiance to him, witnesses to the risen Lord, fosters an ongoing communication with him/God and expresses the attitude of the anawim.*

9 See K. Rahner, “The Immaculate Conception,” *Theological Investigations I* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 201-213, here 206-207 and J. G. Roten, “Marian Devotion for the New Millennium,” *Marian Studies* 51 (2000): 52-95, here 61-62 quoted in I. Naumann, “The Priest, the Virgin Mary and the Dignity of Women,” *Ephemerides Mariologicae* LI, IV (2010): 455-471, here 466.

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Word and heart have a ...deep biblical sense; also, *to keep*, whatever the actual verb used (*Received*: 1 Thess 4.1; 2 Thess 3.6; 1Cor 15.1; Gal 1-9; Phil 4-9; Col 2.6. *Heard*: Rom 10.17; Eph 1.13; Acts 15.7. *Welcomed*: 1Thess 1.6; 2 Thess 2.10; 2 Cor 11.4; Acts 8.14; *guarding what has been entrusted*: 1 Tim 6.20; 2 Tim 1.12, 14). Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 253.

11 J. H. Newman, *University Sermons*, XV, 5, 3 (2 February 1843), quoted in Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 254.

some impression; for the person to whom it is addressed it is a call... and it creates, virtually, an interpersonal relationship..."¹² "Thus, the Word of God serves to create a relationship: the religious relationship which takes root in us through faith."¹³ Mary stands for precisely this reality.

In the Annunciation, she is called by God, addressed with her real name as 'the-object-of-God's-favour' and offered the unique role of becoming the Mother of the expected Messiah. In this encounter with the divine manifestation an important dimension of Mary's discipleship becomes obvious. Transformed as she is by divine favour, she experiences a threefold awareness, applicable, with adaptation, to any discipleship: a personal calling by and allegiance to God, her representative character for her people and the responsibility she bears for all that is human. Further, through the acceptance of her mission, she takes upon herself "the complete uncertainty and insecurity generated by being the first and only one and she does this in the face of contradiction between the poverty of the actual reality and the glory of the promised reality."¹⁴ as so pertinently expressed in the Magnificat. Mary gives "the proper human response to the God who speaks in faith, both in assenting to the truth revealed and in committing herself entirely to Christ continuously - in this she becomes the model case of responsive faith and active faithfulness."¹⁵

Two references to the Lucan account may further illustrate this: Mary's link with Acts 1:14 and Luke 8:19-21 and 11:27-28.

Mary's first response to the Word "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word" re-echoes in Acts 1:14 (although Acts provide no further explicit information about Mary) in a way that demonstrates that Mary kept the word of God in her heart and acted on it - *she has not changed her attitude*. What the Spirit did for Mary in the Annunciation was done for her at Pentecost by that same Spirit, together with all who were present in the upper room: all were inspired to preach the word, the Good News. This seems to be a key-link.

Thus true discipleship, particularly in the Lucan understanding, seems to be tied up with receiving Christ 'virginally' in the heart and bringing Christ to the world in a continuous way. The garment of inner virginity is what is truly essential. In her nothingness and impossibility as virgin, Mary hands everything over to God, and expects everything from God. Ultimately, this is the inner form of all Christian life.¹⁶ Mary did this from the moment she was taken into the mystery of the Incarnation. She is present from the conception of Jesus to the birth of the Church. Carrying out her 'yes' to the Word

¹² Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 253-254.

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"The Bible has a dialogue structure - The Word must be received and welcomed (2 Cor 9.13)." Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 253-255.

¹⁴ K. H. Schelke, *Die Mutter des Erlösers* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1967), 71.

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Verbum Domini, 25.

¹⁶ B. Leahy, *The Marian Profile: In the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: New City Press, 2000), 78.

continuously, she is the most experienced disciple, knowing Christ from his birth to the cross; and again, when the Holy Spirit overshadows and empowers the nascent Church at Pentecost, she is there in *responsive faith* and *active faithfulness*.¹⁷

Luke 8:19-21 and 11:27-28 throw light on the relationship between Mary and the Word, not so much with new elements, as with a new significance. The first passage is in Luke 8:19-21: "His mother and brothers came to be with him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. He was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you.' He told them in reply, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it.'" The second (only found in Luke) is in 11:27-28: "And as he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him; 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast that you sucked.' But he said: 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.'"¹⁸

The reason for Mary's blessedness is her radical openness for God's coming and God's presence in her life, her encounter with the divine mystery in the Word. Mary's obedience in the acceptance of this mystery as the humble handmaid of the Lord makes her the first believer, the first disciple. She, above all, is the one who 'hears the word of God and acts upon it' as Luke demonstrates clearly in 8:19-21 by not simply repeating what Mark wrote in 3:31-35. For Luke, Mary, the Mother of the Word, is in her *responsive faith* and *active faithfulness* the disciple par excellence.¹⁹ As such he offers Mary as model of imitation for Christ's 'new family' in the kingdom of the Father.²⁰

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Augustine, *De Sancta Virginitate* IV, 4, PL 40, 398.

18 See also Mark 3:31-5 and Matthew 12:46-50. In comparison with Matthew and Mark the Lucan passage shows significant differences. For Luke, Mary is the one who 'hears the word of God and keeps it'. He places the passage in the context of Jesus' teaching on discipleship after the "parable of the sower and the seeds that fall on various types of soil, while Matthew and Mark place the passage before the parable, not linking them with each other. Luke seems to want to give an illustration of what was just taught. In addition to Matthew and Mark, Luke not only speaks of 'doing the will of the Father', but also refers to those 'who hear the word'. These words are almost an echo of what Luke wrote in the Infancy Narrative, especially in the Annunciation, where Mary, with a 'noble and generous mind', heard the word, took it to heart and yielded a harvest through perseverance. Apart from her acceptance, 'let it be done to me according to your word', there was her reaction to the shepherds at the birth place, when she 'treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart' and the testing moment leading up to the finding of the twelve year old Jesus in the Temple, when Mary, 'hearing the word of God', 'stored up all these things in her heart'. W. Brennan, *The Sacred Memory of Mary* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 30-41.

19 F. Moloney, *Woman, First Among the Faithful: A New Testament Study* (Blackburn, Dove Communications, 1984), 47-48.

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R. Brown, "The Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation and the Magnificat (Luke 1:26-56)," *Worship* 1 (1988): 249-259, here 256-258.

Beinert rightly comments on these episodes: “Mary is blessed, not only because of her physical motherhood, but because she heard the word and acted on it. This is consistent with the Lucan mariology, who portrays the Mother of the Lord not only as disciple but also as a model for the community... here the result from the Infancy Narrative is envisaged from the opposite side: while there Mary is shown as the original image of the person who hears (God's word), here the people who hear the word of God are described as ‘Mary-like’ people.”²¹

Congar points to another application for the Christian community in that he sees the New Testament understanding of ‘keeping the Word’ as equivalent to building on the foundation of Christ, being rooted and growing in Christ. It is different from a purely passive receptivity in that it calls for an “exchange of gifts. God gives all, and yet we must nourish with our living substance his action in us. One cannot nourish one's own life on the Word, without a self-giving. We have here a mutual giving, a spiritual banquet wherein Christ is incorporated into us, we into Christ. The covenant that makes the people of God becomes a spiritual marriage, and thus a sharing, a reciprocal relation, ultimately ‘one flesh’, one body of Christ.”²²

Thus, Mary's personal *responsive faith* and *active faithfulness* to the Word becomes within the salvation-historical dimension an *ecclesial* attitude, the attitude of the people of God, so pertinently expressed in the *Magnificat*.

The Magnificat – Luke 1: 46-55²³

Underlining this relationship between Mary and the Word, the document *Verbum Domini* refers to the *Magnificat* as follows: “*Mary's familiarity with the word of God is clearly evident in the Magnificat. There we see in some sense how she identifies with the word, enters into it... sings the praises of the Lord The Magnificat – a portrait, so to speak, of her soul – is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the word of God.*”²⁴

The *Magnificat* is an essential part of Mary's ongoing dialogue with the word.²⁵ It is a dialogue between Mary and God and those unnamed believers, those who await the *new* “human reality created through the word which finds its most perfect image in Mary's obedient faith.”²⁶

21 W. Beinert, *Heute von Marie reden? Kleine Einführung in die Mariologie* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1973), 30-31.

22 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 255.

23 In the scope of this presentation, I am not concerned with a comprehensive exegetical analysis of this passage which has been and still is the subject of considerable scholarly debate. For example see: E. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 258-274. G. Lohfink, L. Weimer, *Maria – nicht ohne Israel: Eine neue Sicht der Lehre von der Unbefleckten Empfängnis* (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 249-260.

24 *Verbum Domini* 27-28.

25 J. Ratzinger, “‘You are full of grace’: Elements of biblical devotion to Mary,” *Communio* 16 (Spring 1989): 54-68.

In this dialogue, all important elements of dialogical language become evident in Mary: her self-acceptance, her self-revelation of who she is by the grace of God, her sharing of faith in the God of salvation, and in her dialogue she voices the experiences of Israel and God's promise. Empathetically she interprets realistically the state of humanity and God's saving action, having internalized it and adequately communicates a response that reflects her own understanding – the “portrait of her soul”.

The Magnificat, in the words of Pope John Paul II, reveals *the deepest truth about God and [humanity's] salvation* in that it shows Mary's awareness that in her, as the Mother of Christ, is concentrated *the whole salvific economy*.²⁷

Hence, Mary's Magnificat is both personal and social/ecclesial – her personal experience becomes that of the *ecclesia*, the people of God within the history of salvation.

The unconditional commitment of a disciple or follower to the Lord in his/her wholehearted response to God's call and promise is conformity with the divine will. Mary's response, ‘I am the handmaid of the Lord...’, makes it obvious that she not only accepted what was offered, but also identified herself totally with her divine Son and his mission. The name ‘handmaid of the Lord’ is the only name with which Mary affirms herself in the Annunciation and here in the Magnificat.²⁸

‘I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word’. These words are the expression of Mary's personal ‘mission’, her total attachment to Christ in discipleship - a service that brings salvation to Elizabeth, John, Zechariah (Luke 1:39-45), peace to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20) and above all the proclamation of the kingdom – Magnificat.

Mary's faith is expressed in a dynamic openness towards God and his grace as a *responsive faith*. It shows her obedience to go the way which the Holy Spirit will lead her in the service of the One whom she conceived in her womb. As such, her faith is also the expression of her *active faithfulness*: ‘Let it be done to me according to your word’.²⁹

There is a close connection between Mary's self-characterisations in the Annunciation and her words in the Magnificat. What she *utters at the Annunciation, is unfolded in the Magnificat*³⁰ in such a way that it comprises the whole of salvation history, the expectation of the Old Testament and the

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Verbum Domini 27-28.

27 Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1987), 36. Pope John Paul II calls the Magnificat an “*inspired profession of her faith; Mary's response to the revealed word*.”

28 Luke 1:38a; Luke 1:48.

29 Throughout her life Mary's faith was a growing faith similar to the faith of Abraham. Both Mary and Abraham, hoping against hope, show faith in God as the One who can achieve what seems to be impossible. Pope John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Mater*: “Certainly the Annunciation is the culminating moment of Mary's faith in her awaiting of Christ, but it is also the point of departure from which her whole ‘journey towards God’ begins, her whole pilgrimage of faith. And on this road, in an eminent and truly heroic manner - indeed with an ever greater heroism of faith - the ‘obedience’ which she professed to the word of divine revelation will be fulfilled. Mary's ‘obedience of faith’ during the whole of her pilgrimage shows ‘surprising similarities’ to the faith of Abraham.” *Redemptoris Mater*, 30-31.

fulfilment of the New Testament in the coming of the Messiah. In him the future hope of the *anawim*, of whom Mary is the most perfect representative, has reached fulfilment. Mary as the typological figure of the 'Daughter of Zion'³¹ sums up their attitude in her 'yes' and receives the Messiah "in her midst" (Zeph 3:17a). In this 'yes' Mary becomes the model of the new Israel, the Church; she becomes the model of all who are called to discipleship in Jesus Christ. In her joyful response Mary characterises an important predominant feature of the *anawim*: the joy at the coming of the Messiah.³²

The handmaid motif employed by Luke implies the literally feminine form of 'slave'; and besides the religious context of servants of the Lord (Acts 2:18), it may reflect the sociological situation of many early Christians.³³ Brown writes: "That Mary designates herself a handmaid is poetically beautiful in our hearing, but to outsiders in early times it would be another confirmation that Christianity was bizarre: a group consisting of many slaves, worshipping a crucified criminal. Whether or not the Magnificat came from an early Christian group of 'Poor Ones,' it clearly shares their mentality. Mary has become the spokeswoman of their ideals."³⁴

From this perspective, it is obvious that according to Luke, the Magnificat is a deliberate parallel to the opening of Hannah's canticle after the birth of her child in 1 Samuel 2:1-2. The Hannah parallelism continues throughout the Magnificat.³⁵

Yet, in the succinctness of its antitheses the Magnificat does more than echo Hannah's song and the Old Testament; it anticipates the gospel message, above all the Beatitudes and Woes spoken by Jesus in Luke 6:20-26... In the visitation she hastens to share the word she received with others, and now in

30 See in this context: R. Schnackenburg, *Das Magnificat, seine Spiritualität und Theologie*. Schriften zum Neuen Testament (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1972), 201-243; P. Schmidt, "Maria und das Magnificat: Maria im Heilshandeln Gottes im Alten und Neuen Gottesvolk" (Maria im Geheimnis der Kirche) *Catholica* 29 (1975): 230-46.

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I Naumann, "The Annunciation Narrative as a Model of Dialogue," *Asia Oceania Mariological Conference*, 12-16 September 2009, Lipa City, Philippines. See also H. Novello, "Daughter of Zion and the Advent of Salvation: Mary in Eschatological Perspective," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76, 3 (2011): 238-258.

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This joy in the midst of trust and dependence derives from the Spirit. It is the same Spirit in whom Jesus later calls out: "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Luke 10:21-22.

33 Brown, "The Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation and the Magnificat, 256.

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Brown, "The Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation and the Magnificat, 256-257.

the Magnificat she interprets that word, resembling the interpretation that her Son had given it in the ministry.³⁶ “When Jesus speaks the gospel to people, he does not reiterate his own identity to people saying, ‘I am God’s Son.’ Rather he interprets what the sending of the Son means, so that the Beatitudes and the Woes show both its salvific and judgmental results”³⁷ – it is *the human reality created through the Word*.³⁸

In the Annunciation Mary hears the “Christological identity of Jesus; but when she gives voice interpreting what she has heard, she does not proclaim the greatness of the saving God because he has sent the Messiah, his Son. Rather, her praise of him interprets the sending: He has shown strength, exalting the lowly, filling the hungry. In short: ‘He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke unto our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity forever’ (Luke 1:54-55). In this, Mary exemplifies the essential task of discipleship. After hearing the word of God and accepting it, we must share it with others, not by simply repeating it but by interpreting so that they can see it truly as *good news*.”³⁹

The Magnificat makes evident the *human reality created through the Word*; it is not a reversal of structures and powers⁴⁰ but it “sees things differently in the world God rules.”⁴¹ As such it is a song of and for the poor and the downtrodden. Its expression of the faith of the *anawim* can be seen in Mary’s self-characterisation as the lowly one and her identification with the lowly ones in Israel who reach

35 For Brown, the Lucan infancy canticles exhibit the style of the Jewish psalmody of this era in being mosaics of Old Testament passages which is particularly true of the Magnificat. Brown, “The Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation and the Magnificat, 256.

36 Brown, “The Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation and the Magnificat, 257-258.

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Brown, “The Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation and the Magnificat, 258.

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Verbum Domini 27.

39 Brown, “The Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation and the Magnificat, 258-259. See also Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books and Media, 1974), 35.

40 Power per se is not evil. Negative power “is the tendency to control and acquire personal gain at the expense of fellow humans. It is this type of power that encourages and sustains the injustice, alienation, and oppression that so engulfs our world today.” Shelton, “Christian Empathy: The Psychological Foundation for Pastoral Ministry,” 218.

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out to God as their helper. “The song thus echoes one of the primary themes of the hymns of praise and the songs of thanksgiving of Israel - the activity of God on behalf of the weak, the needy, and the poor, an activity described in this poem as a reversal of fortunes.”⁴² What is at issue here is human dignity, the truth that every human face bears the features of God – uniquely and irreplaceably.

“These revolutionary possibilities in God's way seem to be glimpsed primarily by women who in their own lowliness and need have testified to God's impossibilities (Hannah, Mary). The primary one is Mary herself, unheralded, of no claim to fame, wife of a Jewish carpenter but pregnant before they are married, truly one of low estate who regards herself as handmaid of the Lord and sees that in choosing her, God has exalted her to high estate. So future generations will call her blessed, beginning with Elizabeth's own greeting to her (Luke 1:42). Mary gains no wealth nor power in the worldly sense. Yet in and through this humble woman, God's great purpose shall come to pass. Mary, not Herod or Caesar, is God's revolutionary, imaginative way. She is the demonstration that nothing is impossible for the Lord.”⁴³

From the previous it becomes evident that Mary is “the one in whom the interplay between the word of God and faith was brought to perfection... and “who by her ‘yes’ to the word of the covenant and her mission, perfectly fulfills the divine vocation of humanity.”⁴⁴

Does this mean simply a reversal: The powerless become powerful, the rich become poor, and vice versa? So, then, God has to keep on repeating the cycle? ...That is indeed the way we think of revolutions for it is a typical pattern: The weak take power from the mighty and the poor take the wealth of the rich. The end result may be simply more of the same, only the roles are reversed, and we have a new domination and control. But that is the problem with our limited imaginations over against the impossible things God imagines. In the coming of Jesus and his purpose in our midst, God outruns our imagination. Mary's words are to be taken most seriously: When God's purpose is under way, things do not work in the customary fashion. The proud and self-sufficient, who show no need of God or of God's help, shall not rule and run things in the kingdom that is ruled by the stable-born, manger-laid, shepherd-watched baby; and the lowly, those who cannot trust in their own strength and might because they have none and so have to rely in utter confidence upon God, shall be exalted.” P. Miller, “Editorial: The Church's first Theologian,” *Theology Today* 1 (October 1999): 293-296, here 295-296. “The claim of the poor in the voice of Mary is that there is a power at work in the world where poverty and hunger are not the final word, where the powerful and the rich shall not always remain in control and have primary access to the necessities and goods of life. Thus, our customary assumptions that the poor are only in conversation with God at the point of crying out for help and petitioning is too limited.... The divine saviour is at work in the world...” N. Sell, “The Magnificat as a Model for Ministry: Proclaiming Justice, Shifting Paradigms, Transforming Lives,” *Liturgical Ministry* 10 (Winter 2010): 31-40. “In Hebrew, the words for justice (*mišpat*) and righteousness (*s'daqa*) are synonyms, often interchanged in translations. In the biblical traditions, justice means living rightly within relationship – God and others. A call to justice is a call to righteousness, which is a call to live rightly according to the applicable relationships (Isaiah 58). K. Wiskus, “Founded on Truth, Built on Justice, Enlivened by Love,” *Chicago Studies* 49, 1(Spring 2010):76-96, here 84-85. Although *anawim* originally encompassed the physically poor, the term was used in a wider sense to refer to those who, as Brown states, “could not trust in their own strength but had to rely in utter confidence upon God: the lowly, the poor, the sick, the downtrodden, the widows, the orphans. The opposite of the *anawim* were not simply the rich, but the proud and self-sufficient who showed no need of God...” R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1977), 351, 355.

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Sell, “The Magnificat as a Model for Ministry: Proclaiming Justice, Shifting Paradigms, Transforming Lives,” 31-40.

43 Miller, “Editorial: The Church's first Theologian,” 296.

44 *Verbum Domini*, 27-28.

Here again we are in the presence of this woman who by her *responsive faith* and *active faithfulness* not only heralds the *human reality created through the word*’ with all its characteristics outlined in the Magnificat,⁴⁵ but is an essential part of it.

The Magnificat and Women and Poverty in Asian-Oceania

And how can the message of the Magnificat be *good news* to the poor in Asia-Oceania? Though many volumes could be written in answering this question, here only one facet of such a complex question shall be considered. It is that of women, who are frequently with good reason referred to as the ‘poorest of the poor’.⁴⁶

The Asia- Oceania Region

Considering the Asia-Oceanic region, it is expected to become one of the single largest economic regions of the world, with a growing population as well as progressive economies.⁴⁷

The region witnesses a remarkable diversity ranging from cultural and linguistic dissimilarities to varying levels of economic growth and development.⁴⁸ This diversity results in distinct capabilities and challenges for each country, and therefore presents a unique opportunity for mutual collaboration and co-operation. In addition to economic diversity the social, political, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversities form the foundation of Asia.⁴⁹

But there are numerous regional challenges, such as poverty and inequality, political instability and internal insecurity, infrastructure deficit, and the disastrous impact of climate change.⁵⁰ Not to mention the scale of migration with victims of various political, social and cultural oppression and refugees from climate-change affected regions.

45 *Verbum Domini*, 27-28.

46 Experiences of suppression, exclusion and the participation in political and social arguments and fights led to analyses of the respective social and political situation. Those analyses made clear that women always are the poorest among the poor and have no voice. Pui-lan Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 26.

47 The 21st Century is not without reason referred to as *Asia’s Century*.

48 Economies, such as Australia, Japan and Singapore are building an ecosystem that is conducive for innovation, while others such as Laos, Nepal and Myanmar are still trying to develop their economies for globalization.

49

For a more comprehensive study of the religious and theological context see: M. Amaladoss, *Making All Things New: Dialogue, Pluralism and Evangelization in Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990); M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997); P. Gamberini, “The Concept of ‘Person’: A Dialogue with Contemporary Asian Theology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76, 3 (2011): 259-277; G. Tissera, “Being Poor in Spirit as Human Liberation,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 47, 1 (2010): 77-106; P. Hai, “Evaluation of the FABC’s Theology of Laity,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 47, 3 (2010): 234-62.

Climate change is expected to spare no geography in the coming years. Asia-Oceania is likely to be especially vulnerable as it is expected to account for roughly 60 percent of the global population by 2025 including the significant poor population. The region's geographic location makes it especially prone to natural disasters. And as large numbers of these countries are still agrarian economies, these are likely to be affected much more than others due to variations in the climate, monsoon and falling crop yields.⁵¹

A particularly vulnerable group within this scenario are women. The women from this region constitute approximately a quarter of the world population.⁵² As indicated above, their context is a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-ethnic one. Women differ by their ethnical affiliation, their caste, their economic situation, their sexual orientation and by migration.⁵³ Despite all differences in ethnicity, languages, economic situations, conceptions and life circumstances...there is [for many Asian theologians] a common starting point: Asian women's experiences of pain and sorrow....⁵⁴

They are disadvantaged in many aspects and are subjected to the risk of poverty and hunger because of the systematic discrimination they suffer in almost all sectors: education, work, health care,

50 Asia-Oceania region is itself expected to become a major source of greenhouse gas emissions in the near future as a consequence of rapid and carbon-intensive economic growth.

51 The different governments face increasing challenges in regard to disaster preparedness and management, handling of lower agricultural produce, food and drinking water shortages, rehabilitating people exposed to weather-related risks and natural calamities including droughts, floods, forest fires and disease outbreaks:http://www.itas.fzk.de/eng/infum/gch_auo.htm;
<http://www.kpmg.com/AU/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/ASOCIO-2020-vision.pdf>;
www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/envhlth/climate;

52 On the other hand, "when women have the economic power, the entire community benefits. Studies show that women commit their money for household expenses that relate to health and well-being of all household members, for food, medicines and education. In addition, when the level of female education is higher, there is improved and better quality in terms of maternal and child health and also a higher infant survival rate. In some areas of the world women provide over 70% of agricultural work and produce more than 90% of the food..." It is a call to "working with both men and women to improve economic and social participation of women and girls in their communities... thus aiming at "eradicating some of the deeper causes that generate poverty, such as violence and human rights abuses that marginalize women and girls and prevent their full participation in community life." Agenzia Fides, 09/06/2011 at <http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=29208&lan=eng>

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Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 10, 41-42.

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Annette Meuthrath, „Theologie aus der Sicht asiatischer Frauen,“ *Stimmen der Zeit* 4 (2006): 253-265.

monitoring of activities, and participation in society. The state of poverty often subjects women to serious risks of violence, particularly in conflicts where very often they are the main victims.⁵⁵

Here comes also into play what the Philippine theologian Mananzan writes on the background of the history of colonialism: “Even when all Asian states today attained their independence, the things done by the colonizers are continued (today) by local elites which - in tacit agreement with foreign powers – exploit the majority of people. In this situation of exploitation women suffer three kinds of suppression: Apart from discrimination and subordination women suffer under different forms of violence - both under domestic and social. Often they are victims of quite diverse forms of slave trade: as prostitutes and ‘brides ordered by mail’ or as immigrant workers overseas - as house-maids and entertainers.”⁵⁶

Any attempt in addressing this issue needs to be focused in context (poverty and religiosity of the people in Asia), experience (of pain and sorrow of Asian women), re-interpretation of theological teachings about women (critique of cultural and religious suppression), sympathy and solidarity, and a new identity for women, and for a deeper understanding of the question: What does it mean to be a human being?⁵⁷ – for the ultimate distinguishing mark of poverty is the denial of personhood and the lack of human dignity.

Hence, an approach to this question cannot merely remain within the intellectual domain as a rational reflection but must become experiential in the concrete by a work of the transformation of women-suppressive structures within the respective communities – Church and society. Considering these issues it is also not advisable to forget the particular context while concerned with the universal generic dimension (The attitude of the one in power and the one in submission or the playing out of the West against the East and vice versa.)⁵⁸

What is required here is a *Marian response*, a Marian approach that transcends the western and the eastern approach⁵⁹; it is not abstraction but life, not idea but life, nature and grace ... and hence a specific prerogative of feminine thinking and acting, a holistic thinking and living - so characteristic of the “feminine genius/charisma.”⁶⁰

Proclaiming the *human reality created through the Word* can primarily be possible in the fostering of a truly Christian empathetic attitude, which is essentially the *attitude of the Mother of God* borne through “active listening which interiorizes and assimilates” She is *completely at home with the word*

55 According to current statistics, women account for 70% of the poor around the world. Agenzia Fides, 09/06/2011 at <http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=29208&lan=eng>

56 Mary J. Mamanzan et al, eds., *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1996), 38. In order to oppose that, feminist organizations as e.g. "Filipina" or "Centre for Woman Research" developed in the Philippines. On the Catholic side the awareness grew that the Church owes women a special attention and care, and that this could not simply be subsumed under the work for and with the laity. In 1995, after the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* (FABC), the "Women's Desk" was created. www.fabc.org/olaity/women.html.

57 Characteristics by the Philippine theologian Elizabeth Tapia. Quoted in Meuthrath, „Theologie aus der Sicht asiatischer Frauen,“ 255-256.

58 Meuthrath, „Theologie aus der Sicht asiatischer Frauen, 253-265.

*of God and with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the word of God; the word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God.*⁶¹

Such an attitude “simply acknowledges another’s situation – whether it be sorrow, joy, or hurt, knowing well, that sufferings and hurts are not ends in themselves but made meaningful and intelligible through the bonding and nurturing of a relationship with Jesus Christ and one another.” It “goes beyond merely internalizing another’s pain and hurt but seeks to alter what is contributory to current misery, suffering, and oppression through a continual self-donation in service to one’s brothers and sisters.”⁶² At the same time, it is intimately connected with the acceptance of one’s own human weakness and the depths of one’s human impoverishment. Accepting our very humanness invites us to experience conversion and the radical change and transformation of ourselves in light of the Gospel’s message. It is this facing of our own selves which produces that empathetic sense that guides our efforts. This radical confrontation from within allows for the experience of accepting personal weakness, of deepening our self-knowledge, and accepting our life-suffering which in turn lead us to seek his Spirit which fosters our own empathetic stance.⁶³

59 See in this context the contribution of the Indian theologian M. Amalados SJ who points to the “specific Asian way of thinking in answering the question: By which criteria then becomes theology Asian theology?”: “The Asian way of thinking is more influenced by the right half of the brain which gives more importance to the symbol and to feeling and less by the left half of the brain that emphasizes reason and abstraction. In Asia story telling may be more at home than argumentation. Actually the Asian way of thinking could be characterized as culturally feminine.” “The Korean theologian Hee Han Soon speaks of an Asian mentality and rhythm and of “Asian thinking and feeling” to which the “western kind of reflection” does not suit. For the theologian Song Choan Seng “intuition, the principle of non-violence as well as the Asian nonverbal way of communicating truth (from spirit to spirit and from heart to heart)” are characteristics of the Asian mentality. Meuthrath, „Theologie aus der Sicht asiatischer Frauen,“ 253-265. Although the search for one’s own identity - against the background of colonialism - is justified and perhaps also necessary, it has dangers and pitfalls when it is not done in a differentiating way. According to the Chinese theologian Wong, the fixation upon the west, which becomes apparent also in the demarcation from it, has effects on the Asian feminist theology and its conception of woman: “The clearest result in most of the Asian theologies - including the Asian feminist theology - is the representation of women as ‘the opposite’ to western colonialism.” Wong means the representation “of women in the Asian theology and Asian feminist theology as ‘the poor woman’ - as the victim of both, of western imperialism and of all social and political problems in the Asian countries, and in reverse, as a fighter and rebel who fights for her fate and her destination despite extremely unfavorable circumstances under colonialism and its consequences. Finally the exemplary Asian woman is one who suffers and nevertheless rises, in order to sue for her legitimacy as a subject of history. ... The identity as ‘Asian’ contrary to ‘Western’ has so strongly been built into Asian methodology and into the contents of theological discourses that they are at present fixed upon the bilateral axle of ‘suppression’ and ‘liberation’ of a multi-religious mass.” Wong Wai-Ching Angela, *The Poor Women: A Critical Analysis of Asian Theology and Contemporary Chinese Fiction by Women* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 4-5.

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Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30, 31 quoted in I. Naumann, “The Priest, the Virgin Mary and the Dignity of Women,” 455-471.

61 *Verbum Domini*, 27-28.

62 Shelton, “Christian Empathy: The Psychological Foundation for Pastoral Ministry,” 215.

63

Shelton, “Christian Empathy: The Psychological Foundation for Pastoral Ministry,” 216.

It is “the human capacity, transformed by grace, which leads to understanding on a physiological, cognitive, and affective level another’s situation thus motivating one to willingly offer his or her gifts, nurtured in the believing community of faith, for the building of the kingdom.”⁶⁴

Such an attitude is capable of transcending any divisions between people, between man and woman, Eastern and Western thinking: it is the attitude of a truly *Marian person*, living the Christian faith out of the experience of the divine-human dialogue (biblical and personal).

To enable us to be such *Marian persons*, *Domini Verbum* again directs our focus to the Mother of God: “In looking to the Mother of God, we see how God’s activity in the world always engages our freedom, because through faith the divine word transforms us. Our apostolic and pastoral work can never be effective unless we learn from Mary how to be shaped by the working of God within us: “devout and loving attention to the figure of Mary as the model and archetype of the Church’s faith is of capital importance for bringing about in our day a concrete paradigm shift in the Church’s relation with the word, both in prayerful listening and in generous commitment to mission and proclamation.”⁶⁵

Subsequently, her role in the life of the believer is one of concretizing, as she did at the outset of the history of the incarnation. She connects, brings together and –most importantly– points beyond herself⁶⁶ – showing us how to relate to God and to others.

From the Annunciation to Pentecost every reference to Mary in the New Testament is relational. By virtue of the *donum integritatis* her relationality reflects harmony, it is ordered and just. Her portrait from her first Yes to the You until her presence in the Upper Room gives evidence to a profound development in her dialogue with the You: through creative interaction, passive transformation (pondering), active transformation (Cana); receiving and giving - Golgotha and at Pentecost.

“Mary reserves no area of being, life, and will for herself as a private possession: instead, precisely in the total dispossession of self, in giving herself to God, she comes to the true possession of self.”⁶⁷

To every person, she becomes a tangible sign of hope, for she not only points to a beginning that originates from God who is faithful but a beginning with the end in view, the eschatological fulfilment – God always envisages the whole.⁶⁸

64 Shelton, Charles, “Christian Empathy: The Psychological Foundation for Pastoral Ministry,” *Chicago Studies* 23, 2 (1988): 209-222, here 215-216.

65 *Verbum Domini* 27-28.

66 J. G. Roten, “Marian Light on Our Human Mystery,” in B. McGregor and T. Norris, *The Beauty of Christ: A Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 112-139.

67 J. Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church’s Marian Belief* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 70; A. López, “Mary, Certainty of our Hope,” *Communio* 35 (Summer 2008): 174-199, here 197. See in this context I. Naumann, “Is Mary a Manifestation of the Maternal Face of God?” *Ephemerides Mariologicae* LIX, II (2009): 273-282.

An unreserved affirmation of the above shows that only a Marian person, in whom this Marian attitude has been translated into a *Marian consciousness*, can uphold and safeguard human dignity, particularly (as is the focus of this paper) the dignity and charisma of every woman.

To safeguard her dignity is not only the woman's responsibility but is also a task given to the man,⁶⁹ since, due to the anthropological truth that both are created in the image of the Trinity, they are oriented toward each other for communion and complementarity⁷⁰ - "they are called to exist mutually 'one for the other.'"⁷¹

Here, a wide field opens up for such complementarity and co-responsibility particularly in regard to the cultural context, for in transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place in thought and action which is unique and decisive. Balthasar rightly observes that within a predominantly male-oriented technological civilization, woman's role comes into prominence as guardian of a sociality that provides a home in our technical desert. As the one who symbolizes security, home and shelter, she guard the meaning of being human.⁷²

Here too, Pope John Paul II's words are vital when he speaks of promoting a "'new feminism' which rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination' in order to acknowledge and affirm the *true genius* of women in every aspect of the life of society and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation"⁷³ – the culture of death.

68 Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord*, 47-50, referred to in I. Naumann, "The Priest, the Virgin Mary and the Dignity of Women," 455-471.

69 *Mulieris Dignitatem* 14. See also: John Paul II, *Papal Appeal On Behalf Of Women* (August 29, 1995).

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Mulieris Dignitatem 7.

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Mulieris Dignitatem 7. Communion in the Trinity is complete unity and simultaneous free unfolding of the differences of the persons and their attributes." Gisbert Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott. Eine trinitarische Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder 1997), 265. Here we are not talking of the of the completely autonomous woman who no longer finds her identity in 'partnership' or 'complementarity' with man. B. Albrecht: "Is there an Objective Type 'Woman'?" in H. Moll, ed., *The Church and Women: A Comendium* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 35-49, here 37. See here I. Naumann, "The Priest, the Virgin Mary and the Dignity of Women," 455-471.

72 Leahy, *The Marian Profile: In the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 178.

73 *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30, 31. Pope John Paul II was keenly aware of the discrimination of women throughout history. "Women "have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity. John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (June 29, 1995), 3.

Due to their “true genius” women are particularly disposed toward an empathetic identification with the other, to voice the experience of the other and to interpret the other’s need. And in the experience of her own giftedness and limitation, of her own poverty, woman can engender dialogue on multiple levels.

In the awareness of these characteristics the appeal raised by Adolphe⁷⁴ toward the improvement of women’s lot in our societies is justified. First and foremost, education must be firmly rooted in a profound respect for human dignity and with full respect for religious and cultural values.⁷⁵ It further requires that labour should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women and mothers have an *irreplaceable role*.⁷⁶

“The authentic advancement of women begins with full respect for the dignity and worth of all persons,” she stated. *“Such respect must take into account the entire life cycle -- from conception to natural death -- and states have the responsibility to ensure this in their national laws.”*⁷⁷

Only through an open acknowledgment of the *personal dignity* of women is the first step taken in promoting the full participation of women in Church life as well as in social and public life.⁷⁸

74 Jane Adolphe is an associate professor at the Ave Maria School of Law in Naples, Florida, and a member of the Holy See delegation to the U.N. commission.

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“If this is absent,” she added, “then education is no longer a means of authentic enlightenment but becomes a tool of control by those who administer it.” The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See/United Nations. Panel discussion on *Health and Education: Advancing the Wellbeing of Women and Children, 1 March 2011*, <http://www.zenit.org/article-31891?l=english>

76

Regarding the topics of discrimination and violence against women, Adolphe reiterated the Church's insistence on legislation that protects girls and women “from all forms of violence and exploitation, from conception onwards, including abortion, especially sex-selective abortion, female infanticide.” Also the issue of human trafficking was taken up: the “states need to augment concrete and concerted efforts to work together to put an end to this heinous crime ... strengthening laws against prostitution of children and adults, child pornography and sexual exploitation.” The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See. <http://www.zenit.org/article-31891?l=english>. See also: Freitas, Maria Carmelita de, “Women in the Church today: Charisma and prophecy,” *Omnis Terra XLV*, 414 (March 2011): 122-129.

77 The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See. <http://www.zenit.org/article-31891?l=english>

78 Vatican II has expressed this clearly in the document on the Laity: “Since in our days women are taking an increasingly active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate.” *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 9; Pope John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*, 49.

*Above all the acknowledgment in theory of the active and responsible presence of woman in the Church must be realized in practice*⁷⁹ ... participation on diocesan and parochial Pastoral Councils as well as Diocesan Synods and particular Councils, research and theological teaching.⁸⁰

This same "discernment", made possible and demanded from Christian women's participation in the prophetic mission of Christ and his Church, recurs with continued urgency throughout history, particularly the task of *bringing full dignity to the conjugal life and to motherhood*⁸¹, and the task of *assuring the moral dimension of culture*, the dimension, namely of *a culture worthy of the person*, of one's personal and social life.⁸²

The whole Church sees in Mary what she is and what she is called to become. The People of God has a *Marian profile*. And this is the Church's beauty. In a certain sense, it is by re-living Mary that the Church rediscovers what she is and how she is to be.⁸³

It is in the light of this *Marian profile*, or in balthasarian language, in the light of the *Marian principle in all its dimensions* that the Church will come to a better recognition of the dignity of the vocation of

79 *Christifidelis Laici* 50.

80

"Without discrimination women should be participants in the life of the Church, and also in consultation and the process of coming to decisions Women, who already hold places of great importance in transmitting the faith and offering every kind of service in the life of the Church, ought to be associated in the preparation of pastoral and missionary documents and ought to be recognized as cooperators in the mission of the church in the family, in professional life and in the civil community." *Propositio* 47, in *Christifidelis Laici* 51.

81 *Christifidelis Laici* 51. See here I. Naumann, "The Priest, the Virgin Mary and the Dignity of Women," 455-471.

82

Christifidelis Laici 51. See here also the important work of the *Ecclesia of Women in Asia* (EWA).

83 Leahy, *The Marian Profile: In the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 161-162. For the question of women and the ministerial priesthood, see: *Inter Insigniores* AAS 69 (1977) 98-116; Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World* (Strathfield: St. Pauls Publications, 2004). *Mulieris Dignitatem* 27. J. Burggraf, „Woman's Dignity and Function in Church and Society," 103-114, here 113. See also von Balthasar: In distinguishing between authority (*Vollmacht*) and power (*Macht*), he "exhorts against exalting the service of bishops and priest in terms of power. It is a misunderstanding of the priesthood to propose it in terms of a power fundamentally inaccessible to women. Clericalism in the Church has indeed at times presented becoming a priest or bishop as a culmination of Church membership. But it is love, not power, which reigns in the Christian economy. Office-holders always have to look to the Marian existential form of holiness and, on the basis of this existential priesthood common to all, exercise their ministerial authority." Leahy, *The Marian Profile: In the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 181.

women so that she can be an enlightened model for society that forgets how much it owes to woman and her femininity.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The document's insistence on *looking to the Mother of God*, so that we may *see how God's activity in the world always engages our freedom*, is important *because through faith the divine word transforms us*, encourages us to *learn from Mary how to be shaped by the working of God within us*. It is the formation of the Marian person that will enable us to not only hear the word of God, but to keep it and to act upon it so that the Magnificat can also become the *portrait of our soul*.⁸⁵

Any engagement with Mary or Mariology, be it in academic or pastoral work, must generate in us not only an appreciation of the Mother of God but must bring in us a Marian consciousness that penetrates our entire life and enables us to identify with the other in his or her poverty – to give voice to the voiceless.

This will be particularly important and challenging in our region of Asia-Oceania if we are going to respond to Christ in active faithfulness as Mary did in the redemption of humankind, particularly the redemption of women.

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84 Leahy, *The Marian Profile: In the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 177.

85 *Verbum Domini* 27-28.