

Marian Studies

Volume 36 *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth National
Convention of The Mariological Society of America
held in Dayton, Ohio*

Article 12

1985

The Mariology of Maximilian Kolbe

James McCurry

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McCurry, James (1985) "The Mariology of Maximilian Kolbe," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 36, Article 12.
Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol36/iss1/12

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

THE MARIOLOGY OF MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

When Pope John Paul II canonized the Conventual Franciscan Friar-Priest-Martyr Maximilian Kolbe on 10 October 1982, the Gospel chosen for the liturgy was John 15:12-17. "There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (15:13)¹ would seem an appropriate text for celebrating the memory of the Auschwitz inmate who volunteered to die of starvation in place of a condemned fellow prisoner. While Kolbe's witness of "no greater love" might inspire general interest and veneration among diverse peoples today, it need not however hold particular interest for theologians. The decision of this mariological body to include St. Maximilian on the program of its 1985 convention bespeaks a growing realization among theologians that the "key" to the "no greater love" in Kolbe might well lie in his theological—and more specifically, mariological—insights.

My own credentials for addressing you on the topic of Kolbe's mariology derive not from an exhaustive training in theology, but from an active involvement in the multiple Kolbe-related developments that have taken place within the Franciscan Order and the Church over the past decade: the preparation for his canonization; the renewal of Kolbe's *Militia Immaculatae* movement; the coordination of the "First International Congress on the Mariology of St. Maximilian Kolbe," held in Rome last October, with the upcoming Extraordinary General Chapter of the Conventual Franciscan Order, which will focus on the topic of "The Kolbean Heritage in Franciscanism Today"; the curatorship of the "Kolbe Archives" at St. Hyacinth College-Seminary, Granby, Massachusetts. The book section of those archives, the

¹ *Canonizzazione del Beato Massimiliano Maria Kolbe sacerdote martire*, Liturgical Program edited by Cappella Papale Presieduta Dal Santo Padre (Roma: Piazza S. Pietro, 10 Ottobre 1982), pp. 65-66.

largest on this continent, contains over three hundred volumes on Kolbe in more than a dozen languages. I propose to offer you a modest overview of Kolbe's thought, briefly synthesizing his characteristic themes, tracing their sources, and indicating their speculative and practical import. I think that you may be surprised at how "Franciscan" his thought truly is.

A brief excursus on bibliography would seem helpful at the outset of our considerations. On the level of primary sources, there are presently only two collected editions of Kolbe's actual writings: a seven-volume Polish set compiled by a Redaction Committee at Niepokalanow and published 1970-71² and a three-volume Italian translation of the original Polish set, published in Florence 1976-78.³ Both the Polish and Italian editions are, unfortunately, now out of print. A critical English edition is in preparation, with its first installment slated for publication in 1986. It should be noted that these "collected writings" of Kolbe are not systematic theological expositions. They contain everything from Kolbe's reminiscences with his mother about Polish Christmas customs,⁴ to periodical articles on the existence of God⁵; from inquiries of a Milwaukee pastor about radio transmitters,⁶ to notations in his daily Mass Register⁷; from sketches of interplanetary spaceships,⁸ to a significant schema for a projected book on the Immaculate Conception.⁹ This potpourri re-

² Maksymilian M. Kolbe, *Pisma ojca Maksymiliana Marii Kolbego Franciszkanina*, przygotował do druku Komitet Redakcyjny, 7 vols. (Niepokalanow, Poland: Ojcowie Franciszkanie, 1970-71).

³ Massimiliano M. Kolbe, *Gli scritti di Massimiliano Kolbe, eroe di Oswiecim e beato della Chiesa*, traduzione dal polacco di Christoforo Zambelli, 3 vols. (Firenze, Italy: Citta di Vita, 1976-78). All subsequent citations to Kolbe's writings will be from this Italian edition unless otherwise specified. The first number will be the text designation assigned by the Polish and Italian editors; volume and page reference will follow respectively. When the English translation is not my own, there will follow a reference to the English text in which such passage is printed.

⁴ Kolbe, *Scritti* 837, II:459.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1024, III:54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 829, II:452.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1336, III:804.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1386, III:893-902.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1304-1334, III:711-800.

flects not only the breadth of Kolbe's concerns, but more so the practical and apostolic orientation to which all of his theological speculations were ultimately directed. Theological speculation was for Kolbe a font for apostolic practice. An analysis of the speculative thought in his corpus, while valuable in and of itself, is nevertheless incomplete when separated from its practical application. Even though the focus of this paper is on the former, acknowledgment of the latter is always to be inferred.

On the level of secondary sources, the major critical studies of Kolbe's thought have been written in Italian, Polish, or French.¹⁰ When the *Acts*¹¹ of the "First International Congress on the

¹⁰ Among the Polish studies: O. Joachim Bar, *Studia o ojcu Maksymilianie Kolbe* (Warszawa: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1971); and a sequel to the Bar edition by O. Jan Ksiązek, O.F.M. Conv., *Studia o błogosławionym Maksymilianie Kolbem*, Tom II (Niepokalanów: OO. Franciszkanie, 1981); O Albert Wojtczak, O.F.M. Conv., *Święty Maksymilian Maria Kolbe: Człowiekiem*, vol. 2 of 2 vols. (Santa Severa, Rzym: Centrala Milicji Niepokalanej, 1982; mention should also be made of a brief overview of Kolbe's mariology that appeared in 1971, Józef Marian Świecicki, "Z Perspektyw Mariologii O. Maksymiliana Kolbe," in *Homo Dei*, XL:4 (Pazdziernik-Grudzien 1971): 308-315. Among the French studies: H.M. Manteau-Bonamy, *La doctrine mariale du Pere Kolbe: plein feu sur l'immaculee*, deuxième edition, remaniee (Paris: Editions P. Lethielleux, 1979); J.-F. Villepelee, *Le bienheureux Pere M. Kolbe: l'immaculee revele l'Esprit-Saint: entretiens spirituels inedits* (Paris: Editions P. Lethielleux, 1974). Among the Italian studies: P. Giorgio Domanski, O.F.M. Conv., *Il pensiero Mariano di P. Massimiliano M. Kolbe* (Roma: Centro Internazionale M.I.; Quaderni della M.I. series, n. 4; 1971); P. Giorgio Domanski, *Per la vita del mondo: San Massimiliano M. Kolbe e l'eucaristi* (Roma: Centro Internazionale M.I.; Quaderni della M.I. series, n. 13; 1982); Ernesto Piacentini, O.F.M. Conv., *Dottrina mariologica del P. Massimiliano M. Kolbe: ricostruzione e valutazione critico-comparativa con la mariologia prima e dopo il Vaticano II* (Roma: Herder, 1971); Ernesto Piacentini, *Studio comparativo sui rapporti umani dottrinali e metodologici Kolbe-Veuthey*, printed with Leone Veuthey, *Il mistero di Maria* (Roma: Associazione Amici P. Leone Veuthey e dei "Cavalieri dell'Immacolata," 1981); P. Severino Ragazzini, *La spiritualita mariana di S. Massimiliano Maria Kolbe dei Frati Minori Conventuali* (Ravenna: Edizioni Centro Dantesco, 1982).

¹¹ The *Acts* of the "I° Congresso Internazionale: La Mariologia di S. Massimiliano M. Kolbe" (8-12 Ottobre 1984) are to be published in 1986 by the Pontificia Facolta Teologica di S. Bonaventura, Rome. The volume will include the twelve major papers of the Congress, and several shorter "Communications."

Mariology of St. Maximilian Kolbe" are published in 1986, the fullest critical analysis to date of his theological insights will be readily available. Only one of those published papers of the *Acts* will be in English, Fr. P.D. Fehlner's "Mary and the Mystery of the Trinity in the Thought of Father Kolbe."¹² For the moment, English readers will find some good critical material in two short translations of the mid-1970s, E. Piacentini's *Panorama of the Marian Doctrine of Bl. Maximilian Kolbe*¹³ and H.M. Manteau-Bonamy's *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit: The Marian Teachings of Father Kolbe*.¹⁴ One more notable source of Kolbe studies is the quarterly *Miles Immaculatae*,¹⁵ begun by Kolbe himself in 1938, continued at the International M.I. Center in Rome after the War, and now being revamped into a multi-lingual publication under the editorship of Fr. Fehlner.

The first question to be posed in surveying Kolbe's thought is at once simple yet crucial. What is his starting point? Beginning with his formula of "Consecration to the Immaculate," composed in 1917, through his final meditation on the Immaculate Conception, dictated to his secretary only hours before the Nazis arrested him in 1941, Kolbe's writings exhibit a singular preoccupation with one all-consuming objective: to "extend as far as possible the blessed kingdom of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus."¹⁶ Lest this aim be construed merely as a pious aspiration, rather than a dynamic principle governing Kolbe's thought and action, I shall for the moment skip over the intermediate phases of Kolbe's thought to his final synthesis of 1941:

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Ernesto Piacentini, O.F.M. Conv., *Panorama of the Marian Doctrine of Bl. Maximilian Kolbe*, trans. from Italian by Most Rev. Donald Kos, O.F.M. Conv. (Kenosha, Wisconsin: Franciscan Marytown Press, 1975).

¹⁴ H.M. Manteau-Bonamy, O.P., *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit: The Marian Teachings of Father Kolbe*, trans. from French by Bro. Richard Arnandez, F.S.C. (Kenosha, Wisconsin: Franciscan Marytown Press, 1977).

¹⁵ *Miles Immaculatae: Revista di cultura mariana e di formazione kolbiana* a cura del Centro Internazionale della Milizia dell'Immacolata (M.I.), IV Fascioli per annum (Rome).

¹⁶ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1369, III:835; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 109.

Everywhere in the world we notice action and the reaction which is equal but contrary to it; departure and return; going away and coming back; separation and reunion. The separation always looks forward to union, which is creative . . . First, God creates the universe; that is something like a separation. Creatures, by following the natural law implanted in them by God, reach their perfection, become like him. Intelligent creatures love him in a conscious manner; through this love they unite themselves more and more closely with him, and so find their way back to him.¹⁷

In this synthesis Kolbe articulated, through the action-reaction analogy, his conviction that the Kingdom of Christ would be held together by a powerful force: love. Such love, however, would find its fullest realization in the person of Mary Immaculate:

The creature most completely filled with this love, filled with God himself, was the Immaculata . . . United to the Holy Spirit as his spouse, she is one with God in an incomparably more perfect way than can be predicated of any other creature.¹⁸

In view of all these factors—namely, Kolbe’s zeal to proclaim the Kingdom of Christ’s Sacred Heart, which is equitable with a kingdom of love, and which in turn finds its first verification among creatures in the figure of Mary Immaculate—Kolbe’s emphasis on the Immaculate’s role in building this Kingdom becomes clearer. In 1933, while returning from the Orient to Poland, Kolbe summarized the Immaculate’s role and his own apostolic objective:

We have to win the universe and each individual soul, now and in the future, down to the end of time, for the Immaculata, and by her for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Further, we must be on the watch so that nobody tears any soul away from its consecration to the Immaculata; we should strive rather that souls may constantly deepen

¹⁷ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1318, III:757; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Manteau-Bonamy, p. 4.

their love for her; that the bond of love between her and these souls may grow ever closer, and these souls may henceforth be one with her, with her alone. This is how the Immaculata is able to live and love and act in these souls, and through them. For just as the Immaculata herself belongs to Jesus and to God, so too every soul through her and in her will belong to Jesus and to God in a much more perfect way than would have been possible without her. Such souls will come to love the Sacred Heart of Jesus much better than they have ever done up to now. Like Mary herself, they will come to penetrate into the very depths of love, to understand the cross, the Eucharist much better than before. Through her divine love will set the world on fire and will consume it; then will the “assumption of souls in love” take place. When, oh when, will the divinisation of the world in her and through her come about?¹⁹

What, then, is the “starting point”—or rather, the underlying theological premise—that informs all of the speculative and apostolic dimensions of Kolbe’s life’s work? It would seem to be the proclamation of the primacy of Christ in this world—a primacy which finds concrete verification in the Immaculate Conception of Mary, who in turn serves as means for drawing creatures into that Kingdom where Christ’s love holds primacy. Anyone familiar with the centuries-old “Franciscan School” of theological reflection can immediately see the “seraphic” antecedents of Kolbe’s thought in this regard. Kolbe himself acknowledged the Franciscan connection in a letter which he wrote to young friars studying in Rome at his Order’s Collegio Serafico:

From the very cradle of our Order seven centuries ago, a golden thread of the cause of the Immaculate has without interruption been developed. It fought for the knowledge of the truth of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The battle ended with victory. This truth is universally acknowledged and has been proclaimed as a dogma of the Faith.

And now, is it the end of the matter? No one interested in building a house will rest satisfied merely in describing the plans for it.

¹⁹ Kolbe, *Scritti* 9910, II:894-5; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 117.

But is not the plan necessarily merely a preparation for the actual realization of the building?

Now, then, a second page of our history is opening, namely, we must disseminate this truth in the hearts of all men, those who now live and all who will live until the end of the world, and we must watch over the growth and fruitfulness that leads to sanctification. We must introduce the Immaculate into the hearts of men that there She may erect the throne of Her Son and lead all to the knowledge of Him and inflame them to a love of His Most Sacred Heart.²⁰

This Franciscan backdrop begins to provide an answer to the second question which a survey of Kolbean thought must pose: What are the sources for the Marian Christocentrism which we have already seen as characterizing Kolbe's fundamental perspective? One year after professing his first vows as a Conventual Franciscan in Poland, Friar Maximilian was sent in 1912 to Rome, where in 1915 and 1919 he received doctorates in philosophy and theology respectively. There in Rome, while living at his Order's Collegio Serafico, Kolbe was exposed to the rich Franciscan tradition which stressed the Primacy of Christ (and its pastoral correlative, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus), at the same time as it linked to Christ's primacy a theological and devotional emphasis on the privilege of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Fr. Domanski has pointed out, for example, the impact that two 1913 para-liturgical devotions, held in the seminary, had on the developing Franciscan consciousness of young Kolbe: first, the dedication of a statue of the Immaculate Conception in the seminary chapel in February of that year; second, the seminary's participation in the solemn consecration of the Order to the Sacred Heart the following June.²¹

Such devotions stimulated Kolbe's theological reflections on the Franciscan/Scotistic claim that the Absolute Predestination

²⁰ Kolbe, *Scritti* 486, I:895; *Maria Was His Middle Name: Day by Day with Blessed Maximilian Kolbe/Excerpts from His Writings and Addresses*, compiled by Jerzy M. Domanski, trans. from Polish by Regis N. Barwig (Altadena, California: The Benziger Sisters Publishers, 1977), p. 194.

²¹ Rev. Giorgio Domanski, O.F.M. Conv., "La Genesi del Pensiero di S. Massimiliano Maria Kolbe," delivered at I° Congresso Internazionale: La Mariologia di Kolbe (8 Ottobre 1984), to be published in *Acts*, 1986.

of Christ as Word Incarnate and of Mary as Immaculate Conception are linked inseparably in one and the same decree of the Divine Plan of Salvation. This Scotistic dimension of Kolbe's thought will be seen more fully in the next major section of this paper. For the time being, one reference should suffice to demonstrate that Kolbe is an authentic offshoot of the Franciscan trunk. The reference, penned by Kolbe in 1940, is part of the "Schema" for a book which he was preparing on the Immaculate Conception:

Among the innumerable possible beings that could express his different perfections, God from all eternity saw one endowed with perfect form, immaculate, with no slightest taint of sin, a creature that would reflect his own divine qualities in the most perfect degree possible for a created nature. He rejoiced in this vision, and from all eternity decided that in time he would call such a creature into existence.

When he had created the angels, God willed that they should spontaneously give him a proof that they would always and everywhere accomplish his will. He revealed to them the mystery of the Incarnation [and announced] that some day he would call into existence a human creature made of body and soul, a creature that he would raise to the dignity of Mother of God . . .²²

Before moving into a deeper consideration of characteristic features in Kolbe's mariology, I should note in passing two other very significant influences on Kolbe's Marian Christocentrism: A) the nationalistic cult of the Virgin, particularly the Czestochowa madonna, so ingrained in Kolbe's Polish background;²³ B) the spirituality of the "French School," particularly the dynamics of "Total Consecration to Mary" seen in St. Louis de Montfort.²⁴ The Polish marian cult taught Kolbe to recognize the presence of Mary in practical human affairs (political, social,

²² Kolbe, *Scritti* 1311, III:723; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 78. Please note that I have restored to the English translation the phrase "e annuncio," which Manteau-Bonamy omitted.

²³ Kolbe, *Scritti* 96, I:173; 177, I:304-5; 728, II:324; 806, II:425-6; 989D, II:782.

²⁴ Kolbe, *Scritti* 282, I:426; 508, I:928-32; 796, II:412.

cultural, and so forth) as an active dynamic force. The influence of de Montfort refined Kolbe's understanding of the spiritual nature of a person's self-surrender to Jesus through Mary. Both the Polish and French influences, however, stand only on the periphery of this paper's mariological concerns, because their impact lay in the realm of Kolbe's spirituality and apostolate rather than in the realm of his speculative theology.

Kolbe's theological speculations in themselves stand as the third major issue inviting the scrutiny of this paper's Kolbean survey. The question may be posed: What specific points characterize his mariology? Three emerge as the most salient: 1) the Immaculate Conception in its relationship to the Mission of the Spirit; 2) the Immaculate Conception in its relationship to the Mission of the Son; 3) the Immaculate Conception in its relationship to the Trinity. All three salient points share a common denominator: they focus on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception as the mystery of Mary's personhood or identity. Several of Kolbe's written meditations repeat the question: "Who are you, O Immaculate Conception?"²⁵ Mary's disclosure of her name to Bernadette at Lourdes was seen by Kolbe as a type of "identity statement" akin to Yahweh's self-disclosure on Horeb:

At Lourdes the Immaculate Virgin replied to St. Bernadette who asked her who she was, by saying "I am the Immaculate Conception." By these luminous words she tells us not only that she was immaculate in her conception, but beyond this that she *is* the Immaculate Conception as such. Something white is one thing; the whiteness of a thing is something else. When God said to Moses "I am the One who is," God was telling him: "What is proper to my essence is that I should always be, by my very nature, of myself, with no other principle of being." The Immaculate Virgin, of course, was created by God; she is a creature; she is a conception; still, she is the Immaculate Conception! What depths of mystery lie hidden in those words!²⁶

²⁵ Kolbe, *Scritti*, esp. 1318-1321, III:755-762.

²⁶ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1224, III:516; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 72.

In Kolbe's view, then, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception is the mystery of a person. All of his theological speculations derive from this insight and attempt to unravel the layers of personal relationships—with God and with creatures—that the person of the Immaculate has.

On the level of the Immaculate's personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, Kolbe's fertile mind was at work almost until the very hour of his final arrest by the Nazis on the 17th of February 1941. Early that morning he arose, summoned his secretary, and began dictating a new theological insight that appears only this one time in the whole corpus of his writings: the identification of the Holy Spirit as "uncreated Immaculate Conception" uniquely bonded to Mary as "created Immaculate Conception." Kolbe's insight here stakes out new territory in delineating the intimate nature of the union between Mary and the Holy Spirit. First note his description of the Holy Spirit:

And who is the Holy Spirit? The flowering of the love of the Father and the Son. If the fruit of created love is a created conception, then the fruit of divine Love, that prototype of all created love, is necessarily a divine "conception." The Holy Spirit is, therefore, the "uncreated, eternal conception," the prototype of all conceptions that multiply life throughout the whole universe.²⁷

Next note how his description of Mary Immaculate is totally bound up in this image of the Holy Spirit as "uncreated conception":

. . . United to the Holy Spirit as his spouse, she [the Immaculate] is one with God in an incomparably more perfect way than can be predicated of any other creature.

What sort of union is this? It is above all an interior union, a union of her essence with the "essence" of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in her, lives in her. This was true from the first instant of her existence. It was always true; it will always be true.

²⁷ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1318, III:756; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 3.

In what does this life of the Spirit in Mary consist? He himself is uncreated Love in her; the Love of the Father and of the Son, the Love by which God loves himself, the very love of the Most Holy Trinity. He is a fruitful Love, a "Conception." Among creatures made in God's image the union brought about through married love is the most intimate of all (cf. Mt. 19, 6). In a much more precise, more interior, more essential manner, the Holy Spirit lives in the soul of the Immaculata, in the very depths of her being. He makes her fruitful, from the very first instant of her existence, all during her life, and for all eternity.

This eternal "Immaculate Conception" (which is the Holy Spirit) produces in an immaculate manner divine life itself in the womb (or depths) of Mary's soul, making her the Immaculate Conception, the human Immaculate Conception . . .

If among human beings the wife takes the name of her husband because she belongs to him, is one with him, becomes equal to him and is, with him, the source of new life, with how much greater reason should the name of the Holy Spirit, who is the Divine Immaculate Conception, be used as the name of her in whom he lives as uncreated Love, the principle of life in the whole supernatural order of grace?²⁸

I have quoted this passage at great length to indicate the careful, step-by-step reasoning of Kolbe as he attempts to describe two realities in more "personal" language than ever before: A) the second procession within the Trinity (*ad intra*); B) the Mission of the Spirit outside the Trinity (*ad extra*). Kolbe attempts to recast the traditional terminology in a more "personal" light by calling the second procession a "conception," and by characterizing the first instance of the Holy Spirit's Mission *ad extra* as the intimate interpersonal union of the two "conceptions," one divine (the Holy Spirit), and one human (Mary), both Immaculate.

In earlier conferences on the nature of the bond between Mary and the Holy Spirit, Kolbe lamented the fact that even the phrase "Spouse of the Holy Spirit" seemed inadequate to express the depth of their interpersonal bond:

²⁸ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1318, III:757-8; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 4.

The Third Person of the Blessed Trinity never took flesh; still our human word “spouse” is far too weak to express the reality of the relationship between the Immaculata and the Holy Spirit. We can affirm that she is, in a certain sense, the “incarnation” of the Holy Spirit.²⁹

It is important to note immediately that Kolbe qualifies his attribution of the word “incarnation” here by the phrase “in a certain sense.” Elsewhere he speaks of the Holy Spirit as “quasi-incarnatus”³⁰ in the Immaculate, again using the all-essential qualifier “quasi” as he boldly stretches human language to its limits in attempting to describe an ineffable reality as “personally” as possible. Constantly maintaining that only the Son, not the Holy Spirit, was truly made man in Mary, Kolbe attempts nonetheless to specify the unique personal way in which the Holy Spirit indwells in Mary Immaculate as in a sanctuary or temple which becomes much more than an impersonal shell.

Lest anyone confuse or misinterpret his meaning, Kolbe carefully asserts that Mary’s intimate union with the Holy Spirit is a union of two persons with two natures; it is not of the same ilk as the Hypostatic Union in which the Second Person of the Trinity assumed a human nature. In this regard Kolbe wrote:

The Holy Spirit is in the Immaculate as the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity is in Jesus, but with this difference: There are in Jesus two natures, the divine and the human, and one sole person, the divine. The nature and person of the Immaculate are distinct from the nature and person of the Holy Spirit.³¹

Why would Kolbe get into such linguistic gymnastics? Not simply, I suspect, to accentuate the personal intimacy between Mary and the Spirit, though that is certainly part of the picture, as we have just seen. More significantly, Kolbe’s overriding

²⁹ Kolbe, Maksymilian, *Konferencje ascetyczne: notatki sluchaczy z przemowien ojca Maksymiliana Kolbego* (Niepokalanow, Polska: OO. Franciszkanie, 1976), n. 311, p. 428; translated in Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 50.

³⁰ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1286, III:683.

³¹ Kolbe, *Scritti* 634, I:189.

Franciscan objective—the divinization of the world in and through the Immaculate³²—would be illumined by these new insights. Kolbe came to realize that in the Divine Economy the Mission of the Holy Spirit and the commission given by God to the Immaculate were inseparable. The Immaculate would be the tangible terminus which the Divine Person of the Holy Spirit would make his base of operations. As the immediate term of the Mission of the Spirit, Mary Immaculate would become the locus for the Spirit's sanctifying/divinizing operation among creatures—akin to the way in which Jesus's humanity had served as term of the Mission of the Son and consequently locus of the Son's saving work. It is in this light that Kolbe states: "The Holy Spirit acts solely through the Immaculate; consequently she is the Mediatrix of all the graces of the Holy Spirit."³³

From the foregoing glimpse at Kolbe's reflections on the relationship of the Immaculate Conception to the Mission of the Spirit, access is facilitated to the second salient feature of Kolbean mariology which I wish to note: the relationship of the Immaculate Conception to the Mission of the Son. The Scotistic underpinnings of Kolbe's thought are evident here and color his perspective on her Divine Motherhood and on her Mediation. One of his many texts on the subject should suffice as illustrative of his view:

Of herself, Mary is nothing, even as all other creatures are; but by God's gift she is the most perfect of creatures, the most perfect image of God's divine being in a purely human creature . . .

She is God's instrument. With full consciousness and total willingness she allows God to govern her; she consents to his will, desires only what He desires, and acts according to his will in the most perfect manner, without failing, without ever turning aside from his will. She makes perfect use of the powers and privileges God has given her, so as to fulfill always and in everything whatever God wants of her, purely for love of God, One and Three. This love of God reaches such a peak that it bears the divine fruits proper to God's own love. Her love for God brings her to such a union with

³² Kolbe, *Scritti* 9910, II:895.

³³ Kolbe, *Scritti* 634, I:189.

him that she becomes the Mother of God. The Father confides to her his Son; the Son descends into her womb; and the Holy Spirit fashions out of her perfectly pure body the very Body of Jesus.³⁴

Mary's Immaculate Conception constituted her the most perfect of creatures in view of her future role of advancing the Mission of the Son. Kolbe wrote of the interconnection between Immaculate Conception and Divine Motherhood: "She was Immaculate because she was to become the Mother of God; she became the Mother of God because she was immaculate."³⁵ Mary's conception of Jesus Christ is seen by Kolbe in the light of the relationship which she already had with God by reason of her Immaculate Conception—*sub luce Immaculatae*, if you will: "The Immaculata becomes the Mother of God. The fruit of the love of his trinitarian life and of Mary the Immaculata, is Christ the God-Man."³⁶

Her role in the Mission of the Son advances, in Kolbe's view, from motherhood to mediation. Carefully he delineates her mediation (bound up with that of the Holy Spirit) in its relationship to the unique mediation of Christ:

Just as the Son from all eternity is like a Mediator between the Father and the Holy Spirit, so, too, Jesus, the Incarnate Son becomes the direct Mediator between the Father and the Holy Spirit—as he is in a sense incarnated—in the Immaculata, the Representative and Spiritual Mother of the human race.³⁷

As is evident from these cursory glimpses into Kolbe's thought, the relationship of Mary to Christ—as mother and mediatrix—hinges on her relationship to the Holy Spirit *qua* Immaculata.

³⁴ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1320, III:760-762; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, pp. 133-134.

³⁵ Kolbe, *Konferencje*, n. 225, p. 356; translated in Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 53.

³⁶ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1295, III:696; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 125.

³⁷ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1310, III:722; Piacentini, *Panorama of the Marian Doctrine of Bl. Maximilian Kolbe*, p. 35.

Once again *sub luce Immaculatae*, Kolbe colors the traditional doctrine with a more personalist and manifestly relational hue.

From these considerations of the relationship of the Immaculate Conception to the Missions of the Second and Third Divine Persons, the third salient feature of Kolbe's mariology that I wish to treat emerges: the relationship of the Immaculate Conception to the Holy Trinity. Kolbe's explicit trinitarian synthesis began taking place during the years of his life as a missionary in Japan, 1930-36—years noted by his biographers as ones of intense mystical experience.³⁸

Out of Kolbe's mystical intuitions came the gradually refined understanding of Mary Immaculate as "complement" of the Holy Trinity. He did not invent this phrase; it derives from writings of the Fathers of the Church (e.g., the Fifth Century Hesychius of Jerusalem), as Kolbe himself explained in 1935:

The Immaculate is a person so sublime, so close to the Most Holy Trinity that one of the Fathers did not hesitate to call her "complementum Sanctissimae Trinitatis."³⁹

Kolbe sees the Immaculate as the fullest exemplification of the trinitarian life among creatures:

She is steeped in love of the Holy Trinity, becomes from the first moment of Her conception and forever the "fulfillment," the "completion" of the Holy Trinity. In the union of the Holy Spirit with Her, love unites not only two beings, but one that is the entire love of the Trinity, the other the entire love of a creature, and in this union heaven and earth are united—the height of love is achieved.⁴⁰

³⁸ Desmond Forristal, *Kolbe: A Saint in Auschwitz* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Don Bosco Publications, 1982), pp. 89-120. Rev. Antonio Ricciardi, O.F.M. Conv., *St. Maximilian Kolbe: Apostle of Our Difficult Age*, translated and adapted by Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1982), pp. 125-205. Patricia Treece, *A Man for Others: Maximilian Kolbe in the Words of Those Who Knew Him* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982), pp. 43-56. Other biographies could be cited. These three are the most reliable to be had in English.

³⁹ Kolbe, *Scritti* 634, II:188-9.

⁴⁰ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1318, III:758; *Maria Was His Middle Name*, compiled by Domanski and translated by Barwig, p. 44.

The Immaculate's complementarity with the Trinity, in this Kolbean view, must be seen as referring to the "outer" Trinity, i.e., the Trinity in its operations *ad extra*, outside Itself. Just as there is a complementarity between the two "outer" Missions (those of the Son and the Spirit), so too, Kolbe points out, there is a complementarity between the created terms of both Missions: Mary Immaculate in her dual role as womb of the Son and spouse/temple of the Spirit. By reason of her engagement in both Missions, the Immaculate is complement to the operations of the Trinity *ad extra*. As such, she gives to the Father new meaning in his work as Sender *ad extra*. She gives to the Son *ad extra* his humanity. She gives to the Spirit *ad extra* his fecundity. As such a "complement," the Immaculate herself functions as God's agent, drawing all humanity back to the Father through Christ in intimate collaboration/union with the Holy Spirit. Kolbe summarizes the whole interpersonal dynamic that this role involves:

But if anyone does not wish to have Mary Immaculate for his Mother, he will not have Christ for his Brother; the Father will not send the Son to him; the Son will not come down into his soul; the Holy Spirit will not make him a member of the mystical body through the gift of his grace; because all God's marvels of grace take place in Mary Immaculate who is full of grace—and in her alone.⁴¹

Having examined the foregoing features of Kolbe's mariology, having noted their Franciscan roots, and having placed them in the context of Kolbe's overall objective to extend throughout the world the blessed Kingdom of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus—having completed our survey, there remains one final practical question: Why do you think the Pope canonized Kolbe? Was it merely because of his heroic martyrdom? or even because of his earlier successes as a Catholic publisher/evangelizer? Interview some of the survivors of Auschwitz who shared the barracks with Kolbe. I have done so. Their testimonies pro-

⁴¹ Kolbe, *Scritti* 1295, III:696; Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, p. 126.

vide some startling clues toward the Church's motive in canonizing Kolbe. To a man, these survivors recall less frequently the pictures of Kolbe's final gesture of volunteering for death than they recall the frequent scenes of Kolbe lecturing his fellow inmates on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception—and the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Mission of the Spirit. Amazingly, the testimonies concur, Kolbe held his audiences spellbound. Kolbe the theologian, Kolbe the evangelist, and Kolbe the martyr were one and the same person—an “integral theologian.” His canonization reflects the Church's recognition that dogma and life can and should be integrated.

On his first Christmas as a priest, in 1918, Kolbe offered Mass for the intention: “*Pro Amore Usque Ad Victimam*.”⁴² His final realization of this victimhood at Auschwitz, however, was grounded in an “*Amore*” which Kolbe came to understand only through intense and consistent theological reflection on the primacy of Christ and the mystery of the Immaculate which this paper has attempted to articulate.

JAMES McCURRY, O.F.M. CONV.
St. Hyacinth College-Seminary
Granby, Massachusetts

⁴² P. Massimiliano Kolbe, *I dati piu importanti del “Diario delle Messe” del P. Kolbe*, ed. Giorgio Domanski (Roma: Centro Internazionale M.I.; Quaderni della M.I. series, n. 6; 1972), p. 7.