

THE UNVEILING

By

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Preface

A brief purview of modern American culture and its news witnesses to the fact that modern man is lost. All around us echo the shouts of souls painfully lost, having squirmed and crawled so far from reality and Truth that they wail for the right of self-destruction. Disorder has become normalized. A President is elected promoting “Change”, allegedly from an unethical war, and immediately targets the most defenseless and helpless of mankind for extermination.¹ Man is rebelling, grabbing hold of the levers of life like a monkey flying a rocket.

As upsetting as this currently is, it is nothing new. The truth that humankind cannot bear much reality is foundational and inherent.² The magnitude of our current disassociation with reality leads to the warning that when the creature leaves the creator, to find purpose in himself, the creature ceases to be.

Modern man not only has a tremendous misunderstanding of who God is, but a more basic misunderstanding of who “Man” is. Most Christians attempt to jump to the penultimate question of understanding God without taking the initial steps, graciously provided by God, which directly impact the ultimate answer. This article focuses on what I propose is the first question modern man needs to reevaluate- who is man? In properly understanding who man is, God and our place in the world become much more clear. Clouds are lifted on the historicity of man and the remarkable unity we share with the first created man, and indeed all mankind.

The misunderstanding of created man is not isolated in the atheist or apostate Christian, although it is a component to the current culture of death. The greatest condemnation comes to those who have been provided the greatest graces. I submit Catholics stand first in this line. Pharisetically going through the motions of Mass, believing you are obligating God by your actions,

¹ President Obama, in the dark of the night, reversed U.S. policy in what is referred to as the “Mexico City Policy” which now allows U.S. tax revenue to be used to fund international abortion groups. He also has supported the Freedom of Choice Act and appointed an abortion proponent as the director of Health and Human Services.

²“Human kind cannot bear much reality.” T. S. Elliot, in his masterpiece *Murder in the Cathedral*, pg. 66, placed these words in the mouth of St. Thomas Beckett as he makes his stance for martyrdom.

equally demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of man and his obligation to God, and joins in offense to God.

Introduction

A thorough exploration of the world's pleasures will lead to the question that man in isolation will always arrive at: "is that all there is?" Man can never be completely satisfied with the pleasures of this world. This question of purpose, or meaningfulness, is inevitable. Whether arrived at in youth or on the deathbed, it will always be the same "what was it all for?", "What is next?" This is echoed so pathetically in the purported last words of Queen Elizabeth I: "All my possessions for a moment of time." Time for what? More pleasure? But that would have simply taken her to her next inevitable end of time, and the cyclical desire for more would be repeated. Further supporting her disordered view, she believes that what she desires can only be bought by the material –all she has to give are *things*.

Small cycles of purposelessness drive modern man. Near the close of each small cycle, modern man has no answer for what is next, and if he creates one it leads only to the same beginning of purposelessness. Until man truly knows himself, he is caught living for temporal goals which finality he faces with short-circuit escapism. Time is viewed as an end, never a means. Until man knows himself this soul-hole remains desiring, with pleasure flowing in one end and out the other.

Solomon sought to fill this hole with, among other things, pleasure:

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.³

Solomon's attempt, while much more thorough in analysis, is replicated daily by modern man all throughout the world. Man still pines for something, anything, to fill the emptiness in our souls. Even men living worldly good lives,

³ Eccl 2:10-17

who are loyal and honest, championing the latest Hollywood charity, are empty. St. Augustine's famed declaration that "our hearts are restless"⁴ echoes Solomon's enigma, although Augustine reaches the answer to man's consistent groveling from pleasure to pleasure, which we will address shortly. Ultimately, and to a proportional extent, man will reach the same conclusion as Solomon:

"I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind."⁵

Nothing under the sun will fulfill man's emptiness, and therefore nothing in man himself, from himself, can expand into his own emptiness. The existential view of man's meaninglessness is not modern man's problem. Modern man is worse off. The Gnostic view of man-derived fulfillment has led man from purposelessness to false purpose. Modern man has not been told that black is white; he is being told that white is white but you simply do not want white. When you are continually bombarded with a disordered message through television and the totality of our cultural output, you become infected. Man is being deceived because he has failed to extract himself from the madness of this world, rest, and let his soul catch up to him in thought. Modern man believes he can create his destiny not that he was created for one, a tortured relativistic twisting of God into man's image.

At this point, if you are a Christian, you probably are nodding your head in some agreement with most of the above, as what I am describing is a foundational tenet of Christian theology called Original Sin. It is explained by the fall of Adam and the passing on of this inherent defect in Adam's progeny. The river has been polluted at its source. Man is broken. But, it is the understanding of the depth and breadth of the fall which creates either a theology of life or a theology of death and denial of the truth that man is made in God's image- a concept referred to in Latin as *Imago Dei*.

God gives us paths to know him, the first being the gift of self-awareness. Man has reason and will to know himself. This introspection helps overcome

⁴ "You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power and your wisdom is without measure. And man, so small a part of your creation, wants to praise you: this man, though clothed with mortality and bearing the evidence of sin and the proof that you withstand the proud. Despite everything, man, though but a small part of your creation, wants to praise you. You yourself encourage him to delight in your praise, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." St. Augustine, *Conf.* 1, 1, 1.

⁵ Eccl 1:14.

the inherent fault in trying to view the world through God's eyes –for we are an imperfect image and only see things from an imperfect perspective. Upon understanding man and recognizing the gifts which empower us, only then can we follow God. “Know, then, O beautiful soul, that you are the image of God.”⁶

Chapter One

What is the value of a man?

Are we simply a planet divided, a complex intermixture of sheep and goats? Are there simply vessels built for destruction and vessels for glory, where some are the hunters and others the hunted? Concomitant with the Reformed Protestant⁷ positions on predestination and total depravity resounds the answer “yes!” Ironically, the same answer is echoed from the legion promoting the culture of death. Two seemingly opposed groups arrive at ultimately the same premise – some life is simply not good, some life is disposable. What then is the true value of man?

I. From the beginning

In the very first chapter of the Bible we are told of man's special place in creation:

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God, after creating the vastness of space and sea, as the pinnacle of His benevolent act of creation, shares His own image solely with man. Man is empowered with stewardship over all other creation, placed in authority of

⁶ St. Ambrose, Exameron, Dies VI, Sermo IX, 8, 50.

⁷ From the initial protestations of Martin Luther, there have spawned over 30,000 different protestant denominations, and subsequently, varying interpretations of the major issues discussed herein. It is an impossibility to address every nuance to these moving targets, therefore this article focuses on the generalities.

God's good act. Uniquely, Man is created in a plural image, "our likeness". To insure we do not miss the importance of this passage, God repetitively declares "created" and repetitively declares that creation's foundation - an image. Man is truly Imago Dei - in the image of the triune God, and a creation on which to rest.

As we see, man is declared made in God's image at creation and this dignity is systematically affirmed throughout revelation.⁸ Man is charged with dominion over all of God's creation, having been made man a little less than the angels and crowned with glory and honor.⁹ St. Paul affirms this special place of man, when telling the unconverted Greeks that their ancient poets were correct, in some special way we are "the offspring of God".¹⁰

Immediately after the great flood, while telling Noah and his sons that He will give them "everything", God reaffirms the residual importance of his prize of creation: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image."¹¹ This is no mere command which God is giving Noah on a whim or as punishment. It is a law of nature and of creation. Man shall not murder another man because of the innate quality all men receive in creation. As St. Irenaeus declared, "Man, living man, is the glory of God." God is telling us that "whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God himself."¹² In our creation, each man is placed in high honor by God. This honor derives from our potentiality and exists before any fulfillment of that potentiality.

Solomon in the Book of Wisdom tells us:

God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it ¹³

⁸ Gen 1:26, 1:31, 2:20, 9:6; Ps 8:5-7, 39:6; Wis 9:2-3, 11:26; Sirach 3:11; James 3:9; 1 Cor 11:7.

⁹ Gen 1:26; Ps 8:5-7; Heb 2:7.

¹⁰ Acts 17:29.

¹¹ Gen 9:6.

¹² *Evangelium Vitae*, 9, His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

¹³ Wis 2:23.

We are made in the image of God's own *eternity*. What an awesome thought, and an awesome gift. The Queen's dilemma is partially answered; our emptiness is a call from outside of time. This emptiness is intricately tied to the image within us, an image that contains an eternal aspect that remains unfulfilled by the temporal. We rarely view our souls with such due admiration. This image within us, even after the damage caused by the fall of Adam, possesses characteristics of the original, with the potentiality of becoming a perfect image made for incorruption:

You have imprinted Your countenance upon us; You have made us after Your image and Your likeness, Genesis 1:26, You have made us *Your coin*; but Your image ought not in darkness to remain: send a ray of Your wisdom, let it dispel our darkness, and let there shine in us Your image; let us know ourselves to be Your image,. . . We wear his face: in like manner as the faces of emperors are spoken of, truly a kind of sacred face is that of God in His own image: but unrighteous men know not in themselves the image of God.¹⁴(emphasis added)

St. Augustine refers to us as a "coin" stamped in God's image. The coin, inversely, takes characteristics from the die. A coin is a negative reflection of the truth of the original, the coin fits into the die. Though, the image, originally created in proof state, has become imperfect and St. Augustine calls for the unveiling of the truth within us all, that God may shine light on the man who does not see God's image in himself. But the image is preexistent, man just may not see it. Once that light is shown on the image, it is unveiled within and there is a new beginning, the start of the path to God and perfection of the image.

What is fully encompassed in the image of God has been debated, including distinguishing the scriptural references of image and likeness.¹⁵ St. Thomas sees three progressing gradations of the image of God in man:

First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men.

¹⁴ St. Augustine, *Exposition on Psalm 67*, para. 4

¹⁵ Gen 1:26; James 3:9.

Secondly, inasmuch as man actually and habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace.

Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory. Wherefore on the words, "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us" (Psalm 4:7), the gloss distinguishes a threefold image of "creation," of "re-creation," and of "likeness." The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, the third only in the blessed. ¹⁶

Likeness is distinguished by St. Thomas as being more general and common, with likeness being a preamble to image in that it exists prior to its application to the individual. Likeness is that preexistent quality such as the good which exists prior to its fulfillment in a good man or the truth before it is known. In this sense the likeness is necessary for fulfillment of the image. Likeness therefore is subsequent to image in that:

. . . it signifies a certain perfection of image. For we say that an image is like or unlike what it represents, according as the representation is perfect or imperfect. . . In this sense Damascene says (De Fide Orth. ii, 12) that the image implies "an intelligent being, endowed with free-will and self-movement, whereas likeness implies a likeness of power, as far as this may be possible in man"¹⁷

St. Augustine felt it was man's reason that entitled him to be "set in honor".¹⁸ This honor is the very basis for man's obligation to God: "the very dignity of man postulates that man glorify God in his body and forbid it to serve the evil inclinations of his heart."¹⁹ The honor is fulfilled in proper use of the image, which image directs man to God through invocation, knowledge and love. ²⁰

¹⁶ ST,I Q. 93, part 4.

¹⁷ ST, I Q. 93, part 9.

¹⁸ *Exposition on Psalm 102*, St. Augustine.

¹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 14, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Second Vatican Council Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965 (emphasis added)

II. Retained Dignity

Juxtaposed to this marvel of creation is the truth that natural men, without supernatural influence from God, are also at enmity with God and “by nature children of wrath.”²¹ As St. Augustine eludes, this dignity creates obligation. But, understanding that the Imago Dei exists presently, how are we to understand man’s starting position with God?

Man needs to be renewed, to die to his lower-self and to be reborn in Christ. This is accomplished through conforming the image within man to its perfect image.²² While Christ did not come to trim the tree, but to cut it down, simultaneously, part of the created man exists to be fulfilled. This fulfillment is rebirth and renewal²³, just as a seed is a crumb of potentiality. Unfulfilled, it remains a crumb, a pebble. The growth and rebirth is a death to the lower life, but fulfillment of the higher, potential life in man. The sand in the gas tank is replaced by fuel. That which is nothing but destruction and denial of purpose becomes life and fulfillment.

Much of modern Protestantism continues to teach that man starts at a position of Total Depravity in relation to God. You start completely hostile to God. This position only changes if you are one of the elect, then you inevitably will profess your faith, be obedient and inevitably succeed through to the end of your life. When you peel the onion of this doctrine, you arrive at a functional denial and rejection of the Imago Dei. Oh, so undignified man! A doctrine of polar inevitability or double predestination as it is commonly called, debases the entirety of man and turns our world of opportunity into a scripted screenplay for robots.²⁴ This position is in direct contravention to scripture and

²⁰ International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, citing St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Ch. 1, 1,1.

²¹ Eph 2:3.

²² Rom. 8:29.

²³ Titus 3:5.

²⁴ Martin Luther first taught the doctrine of absolute predestination which John Calvin modified and which has been adopted by Reformed Protestantism. Luther held “Because no one indeed has the free power to think good or evil, but . . . all things happen by absolute necessity.” *Assertio omnium articulorum*, John Calvin leaves the determinations by God in predestination unanswered, although excluding any contribution of the free will choices made by man. For a thorough analysis of Luther and Calvin’s predestination positions see *Not By Faith Alone*, Ch. 7, Sungenis, Robert, 1997.

the totality of the historic understanding of the creation of man, as man cannot be both the crown of creation and abandoned.

It must be understood that a man being full of sin, at any stage of his temporal existence, does not destroy the underlying purpose of his creation, in fact it confirms it when viewed in light of the superabundance of the Incarnation and Passion. The car without gas was still made to run, its purpose is to run, its wheels and lines are prepared for motion, just as Man is prepared for holiness.

The concept that the fall was so destructive to man that the image of God was lost was rebuked in 392 A.D. by St. Jerome:

For, among other wicked things, he has presumed to say this, too, that Adam lost the image of God, although Scripture nowhere declares that he did. Were it so, never would all the creatures in the world be subject to Adam's seed— that is, to the entire human race; yet, in the words of the apostle, everything is tamed and has been tamed of mankind. James 3:7. For never would all things be subjected to men if men had not— together with their authority over all— the image of God. But the divine Scripture conjoins and associates with this the grace of the blessing which was conferred upon Adam and upon the generations which descended from him. No one can by twisting the meaning of words presume to say that this grace of God was given to one only, and that he alone was made in the image of God . . . And again, in the tenth generation, two thousand two hundred and forty-two years afterwards, God, to vindicate His own image and to show that the grace which He had given to men still continued in them, gives the following commandment: Flesh...with the blood thereof shall you not eat. And surely your blood will I require at the hand of every man that sheds it; for in the image of God have I made man. . . . Also after David's time, in the reign of Solomon his son, we read a somewhat similar reference to the divine likeness. For in the book of Wisdom, which is inscribed with his name, Solomon says: God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity. Wisdom 2:23 And again, about eleven hundred and eleven years afterwards, we read in the New Testament that men have not lost the image of God. For James, an apostle and brother of the Lord, whom I have mentioned above— that we may not be entangled in the snares of Origen— teaches us that man does possess God's

image and likeness. For, after a somewhat discursive account of the human tongue, he has gone on to say of it: It is an unruly evil...therewith bless we God, even the Father and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. James 3:8-9 Paul, too, the chosen vessel, Acts 9:15 who in his preaching has fully maintained the doctrine of the gospel, instructs us that man is made in the image and after the likeness of God. A man, he says, ought not to wear long hair, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God. 1 Corinthians 11:7 He speaks of the image simply, but explains the nature of the likeness by the word glory.

In order to fit into the regime of a theology, and be honest with their own doctrines, Protestants must reject the notion of man as favored by God. A predestined elect, not in conjunction with the free will of man, but upon God's arbitrary selection, requires mankind to be equal to worms.²⁵ The awestruck question asked by David in Psalm 8, "what is *man* that thou are mindful of him?" finds no answer in this theology except a quick acknowledgement of natural graces for all men, natural graces that have no purpose but to condemn the inevitable sinner and sustain him for the final hammer of justice. God's patience with man, although already a sinner, and God's placement of man in specific places and times in order that man may seek a nearby God, as Acts 17:28 tells us, becomes a farce. There is no *real* patience or *real* opportunity to seek. In Protestant thought God holds a steak out just beyond the reach of a chained man. It is argued that because God hasn't given the man power or desire to break the chain it is really man's lack of desire that keeps him from the steak- he does not want the steak. In reality, this circuitous logic makes God insincere.

Therefore, to be consistent with scripture, the whole of mankind is "set in honor" and possessing a dignity from creation, a dignity with the potential to be fully re-established, to be made perfect. Having been imaged from the divine "Us" of creation, this perfection consists in being conformed to the perfect man - Jesus Christ. Before it is too late, "Awake, O man, and recognize the dignity of your nature."²⁶

²⁵ Job 25:6 is often cited by Reformed Protestants as support for the proposition that men are worms as compared to God. Here, one of Job's three friends is trying to explain to Job the reason for his suffering. Ironically, God tells Job's friends that they were wrong in their accusations against Job, "for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." 42:7, and God looks to Job to make sacrifices for their forgiveness.

III. The Cycle of Perfect Man

God became man. What an utterly inexplicable simplicity. What was untouchable, that which created touch, enters our reach. Christ, God, *choose* to become man, to enter His own painting and unite Himself with mankind *eternally*. All of Christ's actions were done as a man and were done in complete freedom and with obedience. Christ was born with a soul and body and was nurtured by His Mother. He was taught by his Father.²⁷ He labored²⁸, hungered²⁹, thirsted, became tired, weary³⁰ and He slept³¹. He was distressed, troubled and He agonized over his life and death.³² Christ showed sorrow and fear. He prayed and He cried.³³ He suffered and He died, all as perfect man. He was a perfect man, perfectly experiencing human life and a perfect example of how to be pleasing to God.

Christ acted, and continues acting³⁴, in our name, the name of mankind – Gratia Capitis, or the Grace of the head. St. Thomas clarified that “Christ is the head of all men.”³⁵ St. Thomas also closed the circle between the Image of

²⁶ On the Feast of the Nativity, VII, St. Leo the Great – Sermon 27

²⁷ Mt 13:55

²⁸ Mk 6:3

²⁹ Mt 4:2

³⁰ Jn 4:5-8; 19:28

³¹ Mt 8:24

³² Mk 14:34, Lk 22:44

³³ Hb 5:7-9

³⁴ Hb 9:22-24. Christ's union with man is permanent. He forever becomes man because of his love for us and he continues acting in Heaven, interceding for man. Rom 8:34.

³⁵ ST III, Q. part 3 – “We must therefore consider the members of the mystical body not only as they are in act, but as they are in potentiality. Nevertheless, some are in potentiality who will never be reduced to act, and some are reduced at some time to act; and this according to the triple class, of which the first is by faith, the second by the charity of this life, the third by the fruition of the life to come. Hence we must say that if we take the whole time of the world in general, Christ is the Head of all men, but diversely. For, first and principally, He is the Head of such as are united to Him by glory; secondly, of those who are actually united to Him by charity; thirdly, of those who are actually united to Him by faith; fourthly, of those who are united to Him merely in potentiality, which is not yet reduced to act, yet will be reduced to act according to Divine predestination; fifthly, of those who are united to Him in potentiality, which will never be reduced to act; such are those men existing in the world, who are not predestined,

God and the incarnation in reasoning that human nature itself is assumable by God *because* “according to its dignity . . . [it] was made for attaining to the Word”.³⁶ And the Word attained to be man. We can be co-heirs with Christ, brothers, because we share, imperfectly, in an image of creation: “the Image of God exists in His first-born Son; as the image of the king is in his son, who is of the same nature as himself”.³⁷ Christ is the perfect man in perfect image.³⁸ Man made by God for God³⁹ truly has a special meaning.

This most beautiful plan circles back from Christ to man in an eternal way, as part of us must die, yet we were created with an aspect that can be reborn in fulfillment of an image already within us. St. Paul consistently preaches for the death of a part of man, daily death.⁴⁰ Yet there always is an eternal part of man to be fulfilled through the eternal Christ. Daily fulfillment of the Imago Dei:

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In

who, however, on their departure from this world, wholly cease to be members of Christ, as being no longer in potentiality to be united to Christ.”

³⁶ *Ibid.* “A thing is said to be assumable as being capable of being assumed by a Divine Person, and this capability cannot be taken with reference to the natural passive power, which does not extend to what transcends the natural order, as the personal union of a creature with God transcends it. Hence it follows that a thing is said to be assumable according to some fitness for such a union. Now this fitness in human nature may be taken from two things, viz. according to its dignity, and according to its need. According to its dignity, because human nature, as being rational and intellectual, was made for attaining to the Word to some extent by its operation, viz. by knowing and loving Him. According to its need – because it stood in need of restoration, having fallen under original sin. Now these two things belong to human nature alone. For in the irrational creature the fitness of dignity is wanting, and in the angelic nature the aforesaid fitness of need is wanting. Hence it follows that only human nature was assumable.”

³⁷ ST, I Q. 91 part 3

³⁸ Col 1:15, Hb 1:3

³⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, Ch.1, Sec. 27.

⁴⁰ 1 Cor 15:31

these you once walked, when you lived in them. 8 But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices 10 and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.⁴¹

This fulfillment is consistent with the economy of *representation* that God has established from the beginning of time.

Adam disobeyed and rejected God and thereby represented the whole of mankind.⁴² God immediately chose to redeem mankind by an inverse means of the rejection: *representative obedience of a man*. From Cain to the whole of the world during Noah's life, man continued in Adam's disobedience and God gave representatives. What Abraham led by faith, Moses was charged to recoup from a persistently disobedient Israel. Over and over again, God gave Israel a chance to be the fountain of his plan, as God most beautifully portrays as a reaching and extension of his hand to Israel, and Israel turning away from Him.⁴³ With tears of rejection, God's love and mercy triumph as He saves man despite of man by taking His *own* hand⁴⁴. We see that God has planned all things for our good from the *beginning of man's creation*. God Himself becomes, and mysteriously always has been, the first man, the first Adam⁴⁵.

St. Paul in the book of Romans, 5:12-21, beautifully demonstrates God's merciful plan of representation:

12 Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned-- 13 sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. 15* But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass,

⁴¹ Col 3:1-10.

⁴² Adam, having obeyed Eve, became the world's first wimp. This moniker's placement is attributed to Dr. Alice von Hildebrand, though I have not verified the reference.

⁴³ Is 65:1-3.

⁴⁴ Prv 1:24; Ps 80:14; Jer 13:17; Is 59:16.

⁴⁵ St. Peter Chrysologus, In Gen. Sermo 117.

much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17 If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. 18 Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. 20 Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thus, we see the plan of *Imago Dei* becomes manifest in the Incarnation. Man called by God to be an adopted son, to share intimately with God – the pinnacle of God's creation *made* to be one body with Him. With the Incarnation we see that Christ, sharing everything with man except our sin⁴⁶, is thought of as somehow one with us. The Incarnation alone grants mankind a most special dignity. Christ became man, “that we might be made gods.”⁴⁷

With such an intricate purpose of unity with His prize of creation, does God arbitrarily allow a limited group to fulfill their purpose, to perfect their *Imago Dei* by becoming brothers of the perfect man- Christ? As we have discovered, each man is made in God's image, a creation made wanting. Is this want arbitrarily determined to be misdirected and unfulfilled in certain men, with feigning blame on the created man? Denying a true and sincere opportunity to fulfill this human emptiness denies God's sincerity of offer and purpose of creation.

⁴⁶ Heb 4:15.

⁴⁷ St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 54

Chapter 2

Sincere Universality

I. One Universal Image.

Many protesters of the Catholic dogma of Free Will have attempted to water down the universality of God's salvific will to allow for a double predestination by God. This view holds that God predestines some men for heaven and others to hell. Many supporters of this theory start by admitting that the scriptural references supporting a universal will to save all men do reflect God's will. They pretend that God does want all men to be saved, but they trumpet that God's will is conditional and if the conditions for salvation are not met, even if they are not met because God arbitrarily chose not to distribute grace to enable those conditions, He still willed their salvation. In the words of a commonly misunderstood passage, some men are vessels made for destruction.⁴⁸ In this contorted view, God still desires these vessels made for destruction to be saved – but He makes them for destruction! Other rejections of the universal salvific will view many of the universal will scriptural passages as referring to groups or classes of men, not really all men. These convenient interpretations allow for the separation of men into a group of sheep destined for heaven and one of goats⁴⁹ destined for hell and lead to a concurrent denial of the universality of the image of God.

The image that God imparts in us is exactly formulated for a purpose, and a goal. This being a universal image to mankind, the purpose for imparting that image likewise, is universal. The innate emptiness we have discussed begins with man in need. Man wanting. Man truly unhappy until fulfillment of this need is realized. Are some left crying, stumbling in vain? Throughout scripture we see that after imparting His image in his crown of creation, God goes in search of man, all men, seeking to fill that image of eternity with the only key that will fit.

⁴⁸ Rm 9:22.

⁴⁹ Mt 25:32-33 is a basis for Protestant reference to sheep and goats. In this passage, Christ “will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats”. This passage only addresses the separation at final judgment.

The theme of God in search of man is rampant throughout scripture. "Where are you?"⁵⁰ is the first question God poses to man in scripture. Adam departs from God and God immediately seeks him, and so the dynamic love story begins. Next we see God's interplay with Cain, as He asks "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?"⁵¹ God seeks to comfort Cain, in letting him know that the power for success is in his own hands.⁵² God then seeks the missing Abel and asks Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" Throughout history God continues to seek that which has been driven away.⁵³

This theme is universal, and not limited to a searching only for the elect. God is on a rescue mission: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."⁵⁴ As we know from our discussion of Romans 5 above, all of mankind was "lost" through the Fall and all of mankind is being sought. Importantly, this is the same reparation through representation we discussed above: God as man is seeking all that was lost. A man that "desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth."⁵⁵ A man who is the "Savior of all men, especially of those who believe"⁵⁶ A man who changes a system of law under Moses to a system of grace,⁵⁷ the same grace "which has appeared for the salvation of all men."⁵⁸ Over and over we are told that all men are the object of God's desire.⁵⁹ We are instructed to pray for all men, to pray not in

⁵⁰ Gen 3:9.

⁵¹ Gen 4:6.

⁵² Dt 30:19 "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, . . .". See Chapter 2, II for further discussion on Free Will.

⁵³ Eccl 3:15.

⁵⁴ Lk 19:10.

⁵⁵ 1 Tim 2:4-5.

⁵⁶ 1 Tim 4:10.

⁵⁷ Rm 5:20.

⁵⁸ Titus 2:11.

⁵⁹ In Luke 15:4-7, Jesus tells us what kind of mission he is on: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' 7 Just

futility but in hope of their salvation because that is God's desire.⁶⁰ We must love all men, be charitable to all men, and comfort all men.⁶¹ These are not purposeless commands, but God being faithful to His promise of creation, His promise to an image created for fulfillment. Putting to work the whole of mankind on His rescue mission.

Scripture is clear that God shows no partiality or favoritism to any specific individual.⁶² That is why "the goods of nature and the gifts of divine grace belong in common and without distinction to all human kind."⁶³ It is so easy to neglect the signs of sustenance that encompass us. God chose to create this universe, this universe exactly as it presents itself, and God chooses to continue to sustain all of us with patience from judgment, as He does not wish "that any of us should perish, but that all should come to repentance."⁶⁴ When adversity strikes, a standard cliché is "Life is not fair!" But in reality, life is incredibly fair. Temporal positioning and natural graces have an ultimate purpose, as we are so beautifully told by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, you are where you are so that you might seek God, and He is not very far from you. Whether you choose to find Him, there is no guarantee, but the beauty of existence –of life- is that it is of the love of God.

What then shall we say, when we consider that we ourselves are to be admitted to the sight and enjoyment of this life of God? It is the very end for which we were created. Nay, more: we ourselves have been in some sense, as we shall see presently, part of that divine life. We have been known and loved, up in those regions of eternity, in those boundless tracts of uncreated being, before the

so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Another example is David's explanation to Solomon of the breadth of God's search "And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will cast you off for ever." 1 Chron 28:9.

⁶⁰ 1 Tim 2:1-3.

⁶¹ Jn 13:34; Mk 12:29-31; Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28.

⁶² 2 Chron 19:7; Eph 6:9, Rm 2:11, Acts 10:34, Col 3:25, 1 Pt 1:17.

⁶³ *Rerum Novarum*, para. 38, Encyclical Letter on the Condition of the Working Classes, His Holiness Pope Leo XIII May 15, 1891.

⁶⁴ 2 Pt 3:9.

birth of time; and it is our very destination to enter into the joy of that exulting life, to see God as he is, and to live in endless companionship with him.⁶⁵

God loves us by freely giving us the power, through real opportunity, to be with him. Each and every one of us is created for holiness; holiness based on and from God himself and brought to us through Christ, a man. This holiness is not some remote, lofty saintliness, but saintliness already prepared for you and for your station in life. It will not be judged by how many hours you have spent in prayer or fasting, or how great or holy your life appeared to the world, it will be judged simply on how you have loved. God asks only two things: love Him and love your neighbor, specifically promising that His yoke is easy and His burden light.⁶⁶ This is the “simple path” of Mother Theresa and the “little things” of St. Theresa of Lisieux, and the example of so many great Saints whose lives showed holiness through great love as opposed to great deeds: “The Lord does not look so much at the magnitude of anything we do as at the love with which we do it. If we accomplish what we can, His Majesty will see to it that we become able to do more each day.”⁶⁷

The departures from the universality of God’s will are departures from the foundational love of God’s commands and calls to seek, find, and return to Him. Only an unloving, untrue and deceitful god would tempt man with impossible commands to return to him. Only a distorted view of who man is allows for the compartmentalizing during life of the good and the bad, the saved and the lost, the we and the they – this is God’s love inaction. Christian charity, hope and love strains to exist deep in the heart which views mankind as divided and undignified.

Our God is love⁶⁸ and He loves all things⁶⁹, and thereby wills good to all men by creating man for holiness. This is God’s love in action.

⁶⁵ Frederick William Faber, D.D., *Bethlehem*, pg. 25 , Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1955.

⁶⁶ Mt 11:30.

⁶⁷ *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa of Avila.

⁶⁸ 1 Jn 4:8,16, Love is the only scriptural description of God’s essence.

⁶⁹ Wis 11:25.

I. The Potential Within.

Since God's will to save man is universal, it must be effectuated universally. The mechanism God has chosen to put His will into action is through the gift of free will.

The greatest theological, philosophical and diabolical minds have pondered the mysteries inherent in the free will of man and its synergy with God's predestination.⁷⁰ There exists tremendous scriptural support that in conjunction with the free gift of faith, man has been given an opportunity to participate in the ultimate determination of his soul. This opportunity presents itself in choices between two or more real options, regardless of the equality of gravity of each option, but requiring the real possibility, empowered by grace, of choosing any option presented. While theories on the free will of man have been explored *ad nauseum*, to be consistent with scripture the choice must be real, a true potentiality or contingency, or it effectively denies the sincerity of God's universal will. As discussed above, the universal will of God is to save all men. This is no mere placation of human sensibilities, to comfort the suffering and depressed. God's sincerity is pure and true and faithful, not a false label. Since God could not be anything but faithful to his creation, as He cannot lie⁷¹, He provides all things to fulfill his will.⁷² To suggest, as many theologians have offered, that God truly wills the salvation of all men, yet does not provide the underlying grace necessary for fulfillment of that will, would turn God into a liar. This would alter the veracity of all things, as it is altering God. The objective truths necessary for creation would cease, as it is because God cannot lie that our whole universe is sustained.⁷³

God directly tells Cain that he can do well and be sin's master.⁷⁴ Moses raises the bronze serpent on a pole, a type of Christ, and anyone who looked

⁷⁰ The Catholic Church interprets revelation literally and therefore has always taught the truth of predestination of the elect. With that teaching, the Church also has taken all the passages supporting Free Will literally, but leaves the intricacies of how these seemingly contradictory tenets of the faith coexist unanswered.

⁷¹ Titus 1:2; Hb 6:13-18.

⁷² Col 1:17-2.

⁷³ Those things that are necessarily so, like $2+2=4$ or the Pythagorean theorem, are objective truths knowable even by a child. God's sincerity keeps the truth true, otherwise $2+2$ could equal 4 one day and 6 the next.

⁷⁴ Gen 4:10.

upon it was healed.⁷⁵ Throughout scripture God is calling us to choose life, while proclaiming the reality of this choice:

14 No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out. 15"Here, then, I have today set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and the LORD, your God, will bless you in the land you are entering to occupy. If, however, you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you now that you will certainly perish; you will not have a long life on the land which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and occupy. I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, 20 by loving the LORD, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the LORD swore he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." ⁷⁶

In response to passages like this, the deniers of Free Will claim that God is merely commanding impossibility. They claim that although God means it, that He will give life to those who choose it, man will not choose it because of his natural desire to hate God. Under these systems, ultimately, God is to blame for wrong choices as He did not provide the power to choose the alternative. The cry to "Choose life" becomes "Choose life, although you really can't." An honest reading of scripture leaves no room for such contortions.

When man rejects God it affects God on a personal level as it did when God confronted the horrible rejection by man during Noah's day. When looking at the evil acts of man before He poured out his wrath in the great flood, "it grieved Him to His heart."⁷⁷ But, God tells us how sincere He is: "Do I indeed derive any pleasure from the death of the wicked? says the Lord GOD. Do I not rather rejoice when he turns from his evil way that he may live?" ⁷⁸ It affects God so much that throughout history God has cried out for man to turn to Him

⁷⁵ Num 21:8-9.

⁷⁶ Dt 30:14-20.

⁷⁷ Gen 6:6.

⁷⁸ Ezk 18:23.

and take His hand: “Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you,”⁷⁹ “Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, says the Lord GOD. Return and live!”⁸⁰ and again, “As I live, says the Lord GOD, I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die, O house of Israel?”⁸¹

God was not pleading with Israel as a child may taunt a dog on a chain. God truly wanted Israel to become a holy nation, a kingdom of priests set high above other nations.⁸² That was the fulfillment of their calling, and they failed.⁸³ But it was a *real possibility*. As we have seen since creation, when man fails God, God reigns as the King of second chances. To fulfill the call to Israel, and to be faithful to the eternal promises to Abraham, God brought out a pure light to the nations. It was a multidirectional atomic explosion through time, which eternally and universally calls “Come to me all you who are labored and burdened.”⁸⁴ A call which is empowered by the “Grace of God which has appeared for the salvation of all men.”⁸⁵ The passages supporting this choice offered by God are numerous, and beyond this article to expound upon.⁸⁶ A

⁷⁹ Zech 1:3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18:31-32.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 33:11; Scripture repetitively asks man to repent and to return to God, such as in Mal 3:7. While St. Paul makes it clear in 2 Cor 3:5 that we cannot do anything of salvific value by our own power, even make a good decision or carry it out, as described in Phil 2:13, these passages must be viewed in harmony with the Salvific Will. Passages such as 2 Cor 6:1, that declares we must not receive the grace of God in vain, require such consistency.

⁸² Ex 19:5-6; Dt 28:1. We can only speculate how Israel would have brought forth the light to the nations, Is 49:6, if they had not been persistently disobedient. Scripture does tell us how God would have blessed national Israel: Dt 5:16; 6:3, 20-25; 30:1—20; Mal 3:10-12; Lev 18-5.

⁸³ Jer 31:31-35; Col 2:14.

⁸⁴ Mt 11:28.

⁸⁵ Titus 2:11.

⁸⁶ The following are some of the passages supporting a sincere, free will choice of man: Gen 4:10; Dt 30:19-20; Jos 24:15-22; Zech 1:3; Ez 18:21-32, 33:11; Jer 3:22, 29:11-14; Hos 10:12; Mt 11:28, 18:10-14, 23:37; Lk. 15:4-5, 19:10; Jn 1:7-9, 3:16, 5:40, 17:20-21; Tit. 2:11; Jas 4:7-8; 1Cor 10:6-13; 2 Cor 6:1; 2 Pt 3:9; Acts 17:24-31; Rm 5:6-8, Rev 3:5, 22:17.

passage which traditionally has been relied upon by the Church in support of a sincere free will is from the book of Sirach:

11 Do not say, "Because of the Lord I left the right way"; for he will not do what he hates. 12 Do not say, "It was he who led me astray"; for he had no need of a sinful man. 13 The Lord hates all abominations, and they are not loved by those who fear him. 14 It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. 15 If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. 16 He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. 17 Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him. 18 For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything; 19 his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. 20 He has not commanded any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin.⁸⁷

One passage that is frequently overlooked when discussing the sincerity of the free will choice God gives to man is in the Book of Revelation. In this passage, Christ tells us:

"He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels."⁸⁸

Through this passage we learn an amazing fact about God's sincerity in dealing with man in the whole of creation. God chose to create this universe as displayed before us. God began the wheels of time, from an eternal and in an eternal relation to His timeless self. Time, as a created thing ordered to the crown of creation, man, exists to allow for God's patience in the offering of repetitive opportunities for man to find Him.⁸⁹ While God's omniscience oversees time and knows the entirety of mankind's choices, God so sincerely offers the gift of eternal life through our choices in time, that those who are presently right with God, in a state of sanctifying grace, are actually written

⁸⁷ Sir 15:11-20; This passage, among many others, troubled Martin Luther enough to reject the book of Sirach after over 1500 years of belief in it being divinely inspired.

⁸⁸ Rev 3:5.

⁸⁹ 2 Pt 3:9.

into the book of life by God himself, even those God knows will fall away and be blotted out of the book at final judgment! The choices made during life are real, in our temporal view and in God's chosen realm of temporal dynamic response.

God takes great pleasure in our success, and pains when we reject him. To hold that all of God's pleadings, commands and calls are illusory makes God a masochist. God does not weary, provoke, or grieve⁹⁰ Himself as part of a pre-planned game. God so kindly told us that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, therefore a belief in a vessel of wrath created by God arbitrarily, out of necessity, or without consideration of the free will choice of that vessel, has God self-inflicting pain. A God whose essence is love⁹¹ is not a masochist. Man is really affecting God, and God is really pleased or angered by man's actions in time.⁹²

Chapter Three

Conclusions

We have entered a very dramatic and critical time in the history of our country and the history of man. As Pope Benedict XVI has recently said: "We have drifted into a desert of Godlessness". This is a direct result of man's disassociation with his image, either from a complete rejection of that image in the form of a selfish individualism, or as a functional denial as we have seen by separating people into groups of sheep and goats. It is easy to tacitly support bombing, neglecting and aborting when you can categorize the destroyed and suffering as destined for destruction. We have left the Creator and are a world gone mad.

The culture of death seems so distant and easy to assuage, but we all must be consistent with our purpose and the truth to effectively deny the

⁹⁰ For an example, see Dt 31:29; 2 Kings 17:11 ; 2 Chron 28:25; Is 43:15-24; Jer 32:30-34.

⁹¹ 1 Jn 4:8.

⁹² Make no mistake about it, God's anger is real. It is a holy anger perfectly justified, yet it never overrides his essence of love or the purpose of his creation. In fact, God's anger is a cause for the work completed on the Cross, as no propitiation would be necessary if there was no anger to propitiate. Rm 3:25; Hb 2:17; 1 Jn 2:2, 4:10.

trickery of those proponents. A half-hearted belief in the image of God in all men allows for half-hearted charity and love. When you unveil that truth inside of you, you no longer live for yourself as an isolated thing – you cannot. You now live for all truths, truths that interconnect and bridge mankind into one body.⁹³

Instead of viewing the mere existence of man as a priori⁹⁴ evidence of God’s love for him, these defective views take on a dark purpose of destruction. We must remember that when we were already lost, Christ came to find us and He will not stop until we die. He came to join mankind and leave us with an inheritance of pure freedom and glory. Truly, God has shared His glory with the success of man, first His Son, and then those to be adopted as sons – you! There can be no other purpose for the commands to love and calls to charity than to help facilitate the recipient man’s success and therefore glorify God in fulfillment of His desire. A call to “love your neighbor as yourself” and to “love one another” is a conjunction of man with the rescue mission of Christ.

Every life is created with dignity and purpose, a dignity of being made in the image of God and a purpose far beyond simply living a good life, or being a good person. This purpose calls us to be obedient and pleasing to our God, a God who loves us so much He creates us and imparts in us an innate desire for this union. Even after disobedience, He begins knocking on the door of man’s heart. A door that is latched from the inside.⁹⁵ We need to open that latch and realize our glory, now. Remaining veiled to this mission leaves us filling our emptiness with the illusion of material well-being.

There is not a more beautiful summation of who man is than the Eucharistic prayer IV of the Roman canon. This prayer is infrequently used in the United States liturgy, but I am always startled by its depth when I hear it:

⁹³ Col 3:15; Gal 2:20.

⁹⁴ The term “a priori” is used excluding Plato’s intention of prior knowledge from a past existence.

⁹⁵ Song of Songs 5:2-6.

Father in heaven,
It is right that we should give you thanks and glory:
You are the one God, living and true.
Through all eternity you live in unapproachable light.
Source of life and goodness, you have created all things,
To fill your creatures with every blessing
And lead all men to the joyful vision of your light.
Countless hosts of angels stand before you to do your will;
They look upon your splendor
And praise you, night and day.
United with them,
And in the name of every creature under heaven,
We too praise your glory as we say: Holy . . .
Father, we acknowledge your greatness:
All your actions show your wisdom and love.
You formed man in your own likeness
And set him over the whole world
To serve you, his creator,
And to rule over all creatures.
Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship
You did not abandon him to the power of death,
But helped all men to seek and find you.
Again and again you offered a covenant to man,
And through the prophets taught him to hope for salvation.
Father, you so loved the world
That in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be
Our savior.
He was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit,
And born of the Virgin Mary,
A man like us in all things but sin.
To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation,
To prisoners, freedom,
And to those in sorrow, joy. . . .

Throughout this discussion we have focused on life and the inherent value of the life of every man. It is necessary not to lose sight that the ultimate fight for Truth supersedes corporeal death:

No, gentlemen, the difficult thing is not to escape death, I think, but to escape wickedness – that is much more difficult, for that runs faster than death. And now I, being slow and old, have been caught by the slower one; but my accusers, being clever and quick,

have been caught by the swifter, badness. And now I and they depart, I, condemned by you to death, but these, condemned by truth to depravity and injustice. I abide by my penalty, they by theirs.⁹⁶

This focus of life's true purpose has been a truth taught consistently by the Church:

For however good and desirable mortal life be, yet it is not the ultimate goal for which we are born, but a road only and a means for perfecting, through knowledge of truth and love of good, the life of the soul. The soul bears the express image and likeness of God, and there resides in it that sovereignty through the medium of which man has been bidden to rule all created nature below him and to make all lands and all seas serve his interests. "Fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the earth." [28] In this respect all men are equal, and there is no difference between rich and poor, between masters and servants, between rulers and subjects: "For there is the same Lord of all." [29] No one may with impunity outrage the dignity of man, which God Himself treats with great reverence, nor impede his course to that level of perfection which accords with eternal life in heaven.⁹⁷

I pray you will see that life is beyond fair, it is exceedingly fair and it only needs to be unveiled.

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⁹⁶Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*, translated by J.C. G. Rouse in *The Great Dialogues of Plato*, Dutton Signet, 1956.

⁹⁷ *Rerum Novarum*, *supra*. at para. 57.

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According to Blessed Cecilia, as St Dominic was praying in the dormitory at Santa Sabina late one night, three women entered. The woman in the center began to sprinkle the sleeping friars with holy water. She explained to Dominic that each evening when they invoked her as the most gracious advocate, she prostrated herself before her Son, asking Him to preserve the Order. The two women who accompanied her were St. Cecilia and St. Catherine of Alexandria.

As Dominic continued praying, he saw our Lord with Mary and religious of all the Orders except his own. When our Lord asked him why he was weeping, Dominic explained that none of his Order appeared to be in heaven. The Lord placed His hand on Mary's shoulder and said, "I have entrusted your Order to my Mother." Then, at Jesus' request, Mary opened her cloak and Dominic saw many members of his Order.

Cecilia reported that the next morning Dominic gave the friars at chapter "a long and very beautiful sermon, exhorting them to love and reverence of the Blessed Virgin Mary." He related his experience, as he did later to Cecilia and the other nuns at San Sisto.

While the symbolism of being covered by Mary's mantle may also be found in the Cistercian tradition, what is significant for our purposes is the conviction of Blessed Cecilia, one of the earliest members of the Order, that the Order of Preachers was personally protected by Mary.