FRA ANGELICO'S ANNUNCIATION, THE MOST SUBLIME PARADOX IN ALL OF ART HISTORY

For Helga Zepp-LaRouche's Festschrift on the subject of the simultaneity of eternity where the *fullness of time* coincides with the *fullness of grace*.

By Pierre Beaudry, 7/30/18

INTRODUCTION

"For that all things, whether Angels, or Archangels, or Thrones, or Dominions, were both established and created by Him who is God over all, through His Word, John has thus pointed out. For when he had spoken of the Word of God as having been in the Father, he added, "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made." (John 1:3)

Saint Irenaeus, <u>Against Heresies</u>, Book III, Chapter VIII, Section 3.

It is fitting that the Annunciation of Mary has been considered the most sublime subject of all of classical artistic composition because the subject matter is the highest expression of the paradox of the coincidence between immortality and mortality, between God and Man. This makes of the Annunciation of Mary an axiom buster of the first order.

However, of all of the treatments of this subject known to me, Fra Angelico is the only artist to recognize that such a *coincidence of opposites* involves the divinization of mankind.

Consequently, Fra Angelico's Prado Annunciation of 1426 is the most perfect illustration of such a coincidence, because it is the highest expression of two epistemological conditions necessary to solve this paradox and to generate an axiomatic change inside of the human mind. Those two conditions are: 1) St. Paul's concept of the "fullness of time" (simultaneity of eternity), and 2) St. Irenaeus's principle of recapitulation of Adam and Eve; which is, "fullness of grace" (Redemption).

If I opened this report with Saint Irenaeus's statement of *John 1:3* it is because I wanted the reader to pay special attention to the last part where St. John added: "...and without Him was not anything made." In other words, if any human action is to be validated as a creative action, in any form or shape, it has to be composed with the Grace of God as a divine sacrifice for the redemption of mankind, because what is to be discovered cannot be discovered without understanding the "mindset" of the creative process that has been given to humanity as a Divine Gift of Grace.

1. LYNDON LAROUCHE'S CONCEPT OF SIMULTANEITY OF ETERNITY¹

The reason for examining the "mindset" of God on this matter is because what in religion is known as the mystery of the Annunciation of Mary can, in fact, become discovered by solving the paradox of the coincidence between immortality

¹ LaRouche wrote: "If we think of the history of man as ordered according to an accumulation of discovered universal physical principles, and think of this in terms of a Riemannian geometry like that I have described earlier in this report, we can grasp the universe as a whole, past, present, and future, as a physical space-time, as if instantaneously. All events within that space-time exist simultaneously. In place of clock-time, or the lock, we have a sense of direction, a notion we might subsume under the label of "development." The notion of "development" is that of a Riemannian hyper-geometry so described." Lyndon LaRouche, *Believing Is Not Necessarily Knowing*, EIR, January 17, 2003.

and mortality. There exists no better example where the immortal and the mortal are made to coincide as a gift for mankind as in Fra Angelico's Prado Annunciation.

Fra Angelico's discovery is itself very mysterious because it appears to be a complete impossibility. Why would God turn man into a god? Why would God change his mind after creating Adam and Eve? Did God feel guilty because his first attempt at creating mankind had been a failure? Is God able to go back in time and change things?

You have to dare to ask such questions, because this is when the mystery becomes the most challenging. This act of Redemption on the part of God is believable only if the Gift of God is exclusively for the benefit of mankind; that is, for the benefit of the other, then, and only then, does our normal concept of clock-time become completely transformed. Such an axiomatic moment was identified most significantly by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical <u>Redemptorix Mater</u>, which he opened with the following statement:

"The Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation, for 'when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father! "²

Pope John Paul II noted the crucial idea of "the time has fully come" as the most significant religious moment of transformation; however, this is also a crucial inflection point from the standpoint of epistemology, because it speaks of what Lyn has been discussing for years on the subject of the simultaneity of eternity.

The mystery of the coming of the Annunciation of Mary, that is, of the conception of Jesus, is explicitly located as a moment expressing the "fullness of time;" that is, in a form of time which can be known but only through the process of complete creative transformation of your mind.

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² St. Paul, Gal. 4:4-6.

From that standpoint, the subject of the Annunciation is not simply about the announcement by Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she is going to become the mother of God; it is also the expression of the idea that such an act of Redemption is itself identical with the creative process, which is the most sublime moment in human history when the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is sent by the First Person, the Father, to assume a human identity through the creation of the Third Person, Jesus Christ. From the standpoint of epistemology, the subject of the Annunciation is a paradox of the creative process of triply-extended transformation of how the mind becomes transformed like the process of the Holy Trinity Itself. This is the idea of a density of time that Pope John Paul II developed in his encyclical and this is the idea that I wish to echo back into the domain of epistemology from his religious insights. John Paul II wrote:

"The Annunciation, therefore, is the revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation at the very beginning of its fulfillment on earth. God's salvific giving of himself and his life, in some way to all creation but directly to man, reaches one of its high points in the mystery of the Incarnation. This is indeed a high point among all the gifts of grace conferred in the history of man and of the universe: Mary is "full of grace," because it is precisely in her that the Incarnation of the Word, the hypostatic union of the Son of God with human nature, is accomplished and fulfilled."

This is a very dense statement which requires a lot of attention on several of its parts. First, the Annunciation as "the beginning of its fulfillment on earth" means that there is a coincidence between announcement and fulfillment, as it occurred later with the coming of Joan of Arc in France. There is a *coincidence of opposites* here in which the fulfillment of what is being announced (the death of Christ) coincides with the announcement (the conception of Jesus). Joan of Arc and her divine voices deliberately chose the Day of the Annunciation, March 25, 1429 to fulfill her mission to save France.

Secondly, we have to understand that Saint Irenaeus understood the idea of the Feast of the Annunciation and of Holy Friday as a coincidence in the

³ John Paul II<u>, *Redemptoris Mater*</u>, Encyclical, Libreria Editrice Vatinana.

simultaneity of eternity. The time of the Annunciation, therefore, expressed as the "fullness of time" is to be understood as the same moment as the "fullness of grace." The announcement and the realization of what is being announced must exist in the simultaneity of eternity between the two opposites; that is, between the immortal and the mortal, between God giving his Son, and his son dying for the benefit of mankind. Furthermore, John Paul II makes explicit the fact that this is a moment when "time itself is redeemed." Here is how he develops the concept of the "fullness of time:"

"This "fullness" indicates the moment fixed from all eternity when the Father sent his Son "that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). It denotes the blessed moment when the Word that "was with God...became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:1, 14), and made himself our brother. It marks the moment when the Holy Spirit, who had already infused the fullness of grace into Mary of Nazareth, formed in her virginal womb the human nature of Christ. This "fullness" marks the moment when, with the entrance of the eternal into time, time itself is redeemed, and being filled with the mystery of Christ becomes definitively "salvation time." Finally, this "fullness" designates the hidden beginning of the Church's journey."

This is possibly the most explicit reference to the epistemological notion of time which Lyn has identified as the temporal form of simultaneity of eternity, as time which is pertaining to the discovery of principle of creativity⁵ and that a Prelate of the Church formulated in a theological and religious context. In a lengthy footnote, John Paul II added that the idea of "fullness of time" was also found in four other locations in the New Testament (cf. Mk. 1:15; Lk. 21:24; Jn.

⁴ John Paul II, Op. Cit.

⁵ Lyndon LaRouche, <u>Your Mission Is Your Existence</u>, EIR, March 13, 2009. LaRouche said: "And you have to have that kind of view, and dedication, to look at things as I do, and the way I've committed myself and developed my commitment in life: in exactly that way. You must think backward and forward in time. You must think in a simultaneity of eternity. You must think in terms of universal principles, which exist in the universe, and you have to think back to the people who made you aware of those principles by their discovery of them. And you have to engage in a dialogue with them, you wish to talk to them, to speak to them. To discuss what they did, to say, 'Now, we've done this.' You want to say to them, 'Look, we've done this now; we've used what you gave us. We've done this now.'"

7:8; Eph. 1:10). These references were meant to express that human time had reached a "limit" and a "climax" where the former axiomatic "laws" were to be superseded into a higher form of time which would no longer be chronological time. He added:

"From the point of view of form, it means not only the conclusion of a chronological process but also and especially the coming to maturity or completion of a particularly important period, one directed towards the fulfillment of an expectation, a coming to completion which thus takes on an eschatological dimension."

This last point is the most important because humanity has come to such a moment today. The "fullness of time" has within itself its own finality which can only be predicted when it fills its purpose of changing mankind. Fra Angelico refers to such a concept in his first Prado Annunciation where the time of the Annunciation is its own fulfillment.

Thus, when you are involved in a moment of change which involves the whole of humanity, that moment represents a transformative moment which can be known to fully fill the requirement of the creative simultaneity of eternity.

2. FRA ANGELICO'S ANNUNCIATION AND THE RECAPITULATION OF ADAM AND EVE

"God also is truly perfect in all things, Himself equal and similar to Himself, as He is all light, and all mind, and all substance, and the fount of all good; but man receives advancement and increase towards God. For as God is always the same, so also man, when found in God, shall always go on towards God."

Saint Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 7

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⁶ John Paul II, Op. Cit.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.11 (2):



Figure 1 Fra Angelico: The Prado Annunciation, 1426. Credit: The Theology of the Annunciation

Art historians have tended towards a simplistic view of Fra Angelico and the significance of his works. His purpose was not to advocate an imitation of monastic life. This is too much of a simplistic view of artistic composition, and of monastic life. What he painted was his own state of mind, a state which he intended his spectators, first and foremost his Dominican Brothers, to use as a means of transforming the way they were thinking about their own relationships to God. This is most explicitly the case in his frescos executed for the famous

corridors and cells of the San Marco Dominican Priory in Florence. However, before completing this last work, Fran Angelico had created three unique Annunciations which had the purpose of changing the world from such a vantage point.

As I have indicated in a previous report,⁸ what is stunning about Fra Angelico's Prado Annunciation (Figure 1) is the very loud presence of Adam and Eve being chased out of Mary's Rose garden by Archangel Gabriel. This anomaly is also present in two other Fra Angelico's Annunciations of the same early period, the one of San Giovanni Vaidarno (1430-32) and the one of Cortona (1433-34). (Figure 2)







Figure 2 The three Annunciations of Prado (1426), Valdarno (1432), and Cortona (1434).

In all of art history, only those three Annunciations exhibit such a singularity explicitly recalling the very little known doctrine of Saint Irenaeus of Lyons on the subject of the "Recapitulation" of Adam and Eve. The reader will find out why this is the case as the discovery of this enigma unfolds. It is important to recall this doctrine of Recapitulation at this point, not only because it has been mostly forgotten by most of the Christian Churches throughout history, but also because it is the only Christian doctrine advocating a Promethean Divination of mankind.⁹

It is amazing that the Church Fathers had consistently made the point as, for instance, Athanasius of Alexandria said, repeating what St. Irenaeus had written:

⁹ See my report: SAINT IRENAEUS OF LYON'S DOCTRINE OF 'RECAPITULATION'

⁸ Pierre Beaudry, <u>FRA ANGELICO, JOAN OF ARC, AND SAINT IRENAEUS</u>.

"God became human, that humans might become God." However, most Christian Churches chose to interpret this to be the greatest affirmation of the divinity of man by way of ascetism. St. Irenaeus's exuberant idea of a Promethean humanist idea was discarded completely. Was this simply an oversight of history, or was this doctrine feared as the "Achilles heel" of Christianity? Los Angeles Bishop, Robert Barron, founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, put the question out online in the following statement: "How did we get from St. Irenaeus's exuberant Christian humanism to the modern suspicion of Christianity as the chief opponent of human progress?" 11

My purpose, here, is not to answer the Bishop's question but to emphasize the necessity to investigate the epistemological axiomatic significance of the original doctrine of Recapitulation for our time; not as a matter of religion but as a matter of knowledge. In other words:

The epistemological idea of divinization of man comes from the examination of an axiomatic change in the human mind and soul to such an effect that the divine grace of God can operate inside the mind's self-consciousness. Its purpose is to regenerate, inspire virtuous impulses, and impart strength to resist temptation and endure hardship as a Saint or Christ were able to do it in a process of divinizing their fellow men. The purpose is to breach the ontological opposition between the immortal and the mortal, between the divine and the human by treating the subject as a creative matter of mind.

From the standpoint of religion, the Irenaeus doctrine was very much part of the Patristic historical teaching of the ascetic practice of catharsis, which the Church Fathers called *theosis* and where an attempt was made to restore the state of human grace before the fall of Adam and Eve. This religious idea expresses the deductive fact that since Christ embodied the unification of both the divine and human natures; it was possible for any human being to experience such a reality of becoming divine by doing the inversion of what Christ did. In other words, if Jesus

¹⁰ https://biblethumpingliberal.com/2011/10/28/god-became-man-that-man-might-become-god/

¹¹ Wordonfire.

was able to become incarnate, it must also be possible for man to become disincarnate, which is generally understood as a monastic practice of hesychasm. I am not advocating such a practice here.

From the standpoint of epistemology, however, what this process of transformation represents is something very different because it implies a change in the axioms of knowledge with primary reference to a change in manifold in the epistemological sense of Plato, Nicholas of Cusa, Gottfried Leibniz, Bernhard Riemann, and Lyndon LaRouche. In other words, my purpose is to investigate the Saint Irenaeus doctrine of "Recapitulation" with the beryl looking glass of Cusa.

The first aspect of the doctrine of Recapitulation relates to the question of creative time as Lyn understood and referenced it in his concept of simultaneity of eternity. This relates directly to the Pauline conception of the "fullness of time." Let's begin with Saint Irenaeus stating:

"For we cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods; although God has adopted this course out of His pure benevolence, that no one may impute to Him invidiousness or grudgingness. He declares, 'I have said, You are gods; and you are all sons of the Highest.' But since we could not sustain the power of divinity, He adds, 'But you shall die like men,' setting forth both truths — the kindness of His free gift, and our weakness, and also that we were possessed of power over ourselves. For after His great kindness He graciously conferred good [upon us], and made men like to Himself, [that is] in their own power; while at the same time by His prescience He knew the infirmity of human beings, and the consequences which would flow from it; but through [His] love and [His] power, He shall overcome the substance of created nature. For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should

be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil." ¹²

Take the two truths of "the kindness of His free gift, and our weakness" and relate them as two opposites in search of coincidence. What do you get with respect to time? You discover a discrepancy between two opposite ideas: one is in the simultaneity of the "fullness of time" and the other is in the chronology of "clock-time." Those are the two axiomatically different concepts that have to coincide, eternity and simultaneity. This is what took place when Gabriel saluted Mary.

Pope John Paul II investigated this idea in his encyclical <u>Redemptorix</u> <u>Mater</u>. What did he mean when he said that the divine Gift of Grace was located in the discovery of the "<u>fullness of time</u>?" Here, John Paul II is helping us grasp the idea of simultaneity of eternity from the standpoint of faith and with the same idea that Fra Angelico had portrayed in his Prado Annunciation: the coincidence of the two opposites of *eternity and simultaneity*.



Figure 3 Detail of the Prado Annunciation.

¹² Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.38 (4).

The stillness of the motion of this transformation is obvious in the mirror imaging projection between Gabriel and Mary. (Figure 3) There is, in the creative process of Redemption, a special aspect of immortality attached to the idea of divine incarnation of the Word; it is the fact that what is accomplished has been conceived by the Holy Spirit as sent by the Father. The surprising part comes at the end of the process of transformation, and does not appear in "clock-time" but is only suggested in the simultaneity of eternity with the idea of the "fullness of time."

To see it, one must concentrate on the sublime manner in which Fra Angelico has made the angel to resemble Mary and Mary to resemble the angel, as if the two were exchanging their identities: that's the *coincidence of the opposites*, the image of the mental conception of that coincidence, because *conceptus*, in Latin means both holding together and receiving together. What is Mary receiving from Gabriel? She is receiving the "*fullness of grace*." Such is the density of the moment that you have come here to discover.

Thus, the mirror image between Angel Gabriel and Mary is the process of transmitting the coincidence between the "fullness of time" (pleroma tou chronou) and the "fullness of grace" (kecharitomene) as they are both derived from the consubstantiality between the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit; that is, the creative coming together of the immortal within the mortal. The great mystery is thus unveiled through Gabriel's greeting to Mary: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee" (LK. 1:28) as is written on the support base of the painting: "Ave Maria, Gracia Plena..."

Furthermore, the attention should be placed on the epistemological significance of the idea of "*full of grace*" rather than on the religious significance. As John Paul II said:

"But at the same time the "fullness of grace" indicates all the supernatural munificence from which Mary benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ. If this election is fundamental for the accomplishment of God's salvific designs for humanity, and if the eternal choice in Christ and the vocation to the dignity of adopted children is the destiny of everyone, then the election of Mary is wholly exceptional and unique. Hence also the singularity and uniqueness of her place in the mystery of Christ."¹³

Now, ask yourself: "What is the singularity and uniqueness of the human mind in that place?" Do an *analysis situs* investigation of the painting. Have a look at the iconic portrait of God the Father on the ceiling beam and note how, from the corner of his eye, He is looking at the magpie standing on a crossbar above Mary's head. Observe how God's eye, the magpie, and Mary are in the same viewing line. What is this about?

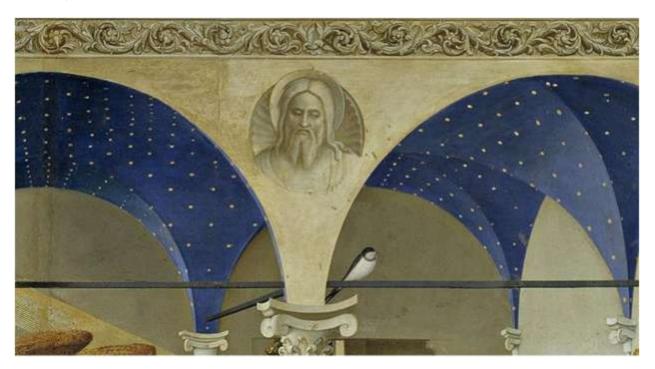


Figure 4 God keeping an eye on the magpie.

The presence of the magpie may be interpreted as a warning against deception. This black and white bird is generally viewed as a metaphor depicting gossiping lies, and conveying deceitful messages. In the Cortona and Valdarno Annunciations, the position of the magpie is ironically replaced by the position of

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¹³ John Paul II, Op. Cit.

the dove of the Holy Spirit. These are interesting inversions which also reinforce the idea of the process of inversion of positions such as the crossed hands of Mary and of Gabriel, as projected in a mirror image. These are a lot of visual inversions for such a subject matter, which makes you wonder: "What is really being announced, here? Is what is being announced really corresponding to what meets the eye?"

The epistemological implications are that Mary (and the viewer) has to be perplexed and fearful because she (and the viewer) is going through an axiomatic transformation. What is being announced is the process of transformation itself. Mary's reason cannot understand how something eternal can coexist with something that is mortal; there is an aversion to the inversion process here, a conflict of opposites, a paradox to be resolved. And, Mary must resolve the paradox by having her intellect discover the "coincidence of opposites." Her creative intellect has to discover that she is becoming one with God in the Holy Trinity.

What she discovers, through the Grace of God, is that the process of the axiomatic transformation of her mind and body coincides with the triply-extended process that has been the cause of her own mental existence and everything else in the Universe since she was born, ever since the creation of Adam and Eve. She is capable of internalizing this axiomatic process only when Gabriel says to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35).

Thus, the Annunciation reveals the creative process itself, as an inversion of the moment of the creation of Adam and Eve with the moment of Redemption through the crucifixion of Christ. It is for this reason that Adam and Eve are also present in the painting of Fra Angelico.



Figure 5 Eve keeping an eye on the viewer.

Then, Pope John Paul II added this amazing paradox for the reader to grapple with and to solve:

"By virtue of the richness of the grace of the beloved Son, by reason of the redemptive merits of him who willed to become her Son, Mary was preserved from the inheritance of original sin. In this way, from the first moment of her conception—which is to say of her existence – she belonged to Christ, sharing in the salvific and sanctifying grace and in that love which has its beginning in the "Beloved," the Son of the Eternal Father, who through the Incarnation became her own Son. Consequently, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, Mary receives life from him to whom she herself, in the order of earthly generation, gave life as a mother. The liturgy does not hesitate to call her "mother of her Creator" and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of St. Bernard: "daughter of your Son." And since Mary receives this "new life" with a fullness corresponding to the

Son's love for the Mother, and thus corresponding to the dignity of the divine motherhood, the angel at the Annunciation calls her "full of grace." ¹⁴

Thus, the Annunciation turns the world upside down, as Saint Irenaeus had demonstrated before, when he wrote:

"For just as the former was led astray by the word of an angel, so that



she fled from God when she had transgressed His word; so did the latter, by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should sustain (portaret) God, being obedient to His word. And if the former did disobey God, yet the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the patroness (advocata) of the virgin Eve. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so is it rescued by a virgin; disobedience virginal having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience. For in the same way the sin of the first created man (protoplasti) receives amendment by the correction of the Firstbegotten, and the coming of the serpent is conquered by the harmlessness of the dove, those bonds being unloosed by which we had been fast bound to death."15

Figure 6 "Hail Mary! Full of Grace."

John Paul II, Op. Cit.
 Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 19, 1: 5.

Thus, when Mary uttered "Let it be according to your word," and as the fathers of the Church, especially Saint Augustine, have established, Mary had conceived of Christ in her mind and her faith before she conceived of Him in her body. It becomes clear, then, that in the concept of "the Mother of God," there is an underlying paradox to be discovered and resolved. As Augustine said: "The one who created her, you see, was created from her." ¹⁶

It is in the density of such discoveries that one must connect the "fullness of time" with the "fullness of grace" in the simultaneity of eternity; which confirms that the significance of the redemption is first and foremost a matter of mind.

CONCLUSION: REDEMPTION IS IN THE PARADOX

What is generally recognized in epistemology as in religion, is the fact that an axiomatic transformation of the mind or the soul requires redemption from a previous mistake. This is precisely what Plato noted in his *Meno* dialogue when the slave boy became perplexed because he was unable to find the way to double the area of the square. He was not atoning for his mistake.

Saint Irenaeus described how the actual process of redemption began: "And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the Virgin Mary set free through faith."¹⁷

At the end of his encyclical, John Paul II comes back to this most difficult question about the mystery of the "great transformation" that the Annunciation represents for the human mind. He points to the double impossible idea of the

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¹⁶ Augustine Through the Ages, An Encyclopedia, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Cambridge, U.K., 1999, p. 543.

¹⁷ Saint Irenaeus, *Op. Cit.*, III, 22:4

humanization of God and the divinization of man as being expressed by the amazing paradox located in the middle of the Liturgy of the Hours:

"Loving Mother of the Redeemer, gate of heaven, star of the sea, assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again.

To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator,

Yet remained a virgin after as before.

You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting, have pity on us poor sinners."

This is a most beautiful prayer, but it is also a devastating paradox that most people miss when they recite it without thinking. *How can Mary be the mother of her Creator?* This is the challenge that I started this report with and which I leave you with in ending it. As Dante wrote in the opening stanza of his last canto of Paradise:

"O Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son!" 19

It is the shocking reality of this paradoxical inversion which proves that God did not put the human mind before an endless struggle without giving it the means to become divine. He has given us, especially with the Annunciation of Mary, the ability to reach to the higher manifold which man is capable of constructing in his own mind, with his own forces, but never without the Grace of God.

Happy 70th Birthday Helga.

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¹⁸ Alma Redemptoris Mater.: Loving Mother of the Redeemer.

Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Everyman's Library, Dutton: New York, 1967, p. 439.