

Quasi-incarnation?

THE TEACHINGS AND EVANGELISM OF THE MI

One of the reasons why Kolbe envisioned the Miraculous Medal to play such a prominent part in the apostolic mission of the MI is due to its influence in converting Alphonse Ratisbonne. Ratisbonne, an agnostic Jew, was wearing a Miraculous Medal when Our Lady appeared to him at the church of Sant'Andrea delle Fratte in Rome in 1842. He was instantly converted, having walked out a Catholic, saying that he now "understood all." Learning of Ratisbonne's conversion through this medal was one of the events that inspired Kolbe to found the MI. As Fr. Alberto Arzilli, OFM Conv., a fellow friar with Kolbe, related the story on April 26, 1942:

"Fr. Maximilian... was convinced of what he had to do [regarding the founding of the MI] on the [75th] anniversary day of the apparition of Our Lady to Alphonse Ratisbonne, January 20, 1917. The inspiration came to him during the morning meditation conducted by Father Rector Ignudi. In the meditation, Father Ignudi told the story of Ratisbonne's miraculous conversion and commented on it.

"With a face beaming and bubbling with joy at the power of Our Lady shown in the conversion of Ratisbonne, Friar Max spoke to me of his inspiration. Smiling, he told me we had to crush the Devil and all heresies, and especially the error of Masonry."

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In his writings on the "Immaculata" (the name he used for Mary under the title, Immaculate Conception), he would often ask, "Who are you?" For Our Lady did not say "I was immaculately conceived," but instead identified herself, her very being ("I am") with the "Immaculate Conception."

Kolbe says these words of Mary "point up not only the fact that she was conceived without sin, but also how this privilege belongs to her. It is not something accidental; it is something that belongs to her very nature. For she is the Immaculate Conception in person."

The above words are taken from the Polish Martyr's last writing, a few hours before his final arrest by the Nazis on February 17, 1941, when he would be taken to Auschwitz and eventually be killed by lethal injection after offering his life in place of a fellow prisoner. In this same "Final Sketch", Kolbe arrived at a profound insight, an "answer" it seems (at least in part) to his persistent question, "Who are you, Immaculata?" He calls Mary the created Immaculate Conception, created sinless and from conception uniquely filled with an abundance of grace, to be made superabundantly fruitful when she would become the Mother of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

As Kolbe says: "He [the Holy Spirit] makes her fruitful, from the very first instant of her existence, all during her life, and for all eternity."

Additionally, he calls the Holy Spirit the Uncreated, Eternal Immaculate Conception, who is "conceived" from the love that flows eternally between the Father and the Son; a love so perfect that it is personified. Kolbe explains:

Everything that exists, outside of God himself, since it is from God and depends upon him in every way, bears within itself some semblance to its Creator . . . because every created thing is an effect of the Primal Cause.

The words we use to speak of created realities indeed express the divine perfections only in a halting, limited and analogical manner. They are only a more or less distant echo — as are created realities that they signify — of the properties of God himself.

Would not "conception" be an exception to this rule? No, there is never any exception . . .

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 the conceptions that multiply life throughout the whole universe.

In other writings, the Polish friar attempts to describe Mary's profound, intimate union with the Third Person of the Trinity from her conception, by calling Mary the "quasi-incarnation" of the Holy Spirit. He is careful to stress that this union "is not of the same order as the hypostatic union linking the human and divine natures in Christ"; for he repeated often that the Holy Spirit does not dwell in Mary in the same way in which the Eternal Word is present in the sacred humanity of Jesus.¹⁵

The notion of the Holy Spirit becoming "in some manner" (quasi) incarnate in Mary may at first seem to be an extreme idea. However, it is somewhat analogous to the statement by St. Louis de Montfort, that "God the Son wishes to form himself, and in a manner of speaking, become incarnate every day in his members through his dear Mother." Along the same lines, St. Paul says: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

With the term "**quasi-incarnation**", Kolbe means that **Mary is so much like (quasi) the Holy Spirit, in that she reflects the Third Person of the Trinity, especially in two qualities or attributes: receptivity and fruitfulness.**

The Holy Spirit is the Fruit of the Father and the Son. He was "eternally conceived," if you will, as the Fruit of the all-pure love which has forever flowed between the Father and the Son. He receives the mutual love of the Father and the Son and eternally fructifies it within the inner life of the Trinity.

Mary's sinlessness from conception is the fruit of God's love. At Mary's conception, the Holy Spirit conformed her to himself. The Blessed Virgin, because of the singular grace of her Immaculate Conception, is receptive to the love of God. At the Annunciation, she receives God's love and, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, makes that love fruitful — infinitely so — in conceiving the Incarnate Word

Mary's receptivity and fruitfulness did not end with the Conception and Birth of Christ. Now in Heaven, Mary remains the living, human conduit for the graces that the Holy Spirit distributes to us. As Kolbe says:

[T]he Holy Spirit manifests his share in the word of Redemption through the Immaculate Virgin, who, although she is a person entirely distinct from him, is so intimately associated with him that our minds cannot understand it. So, while their union is not of the same order as the hypostatic union linking the human and divine natures in Christ, it remains true to say that Mary's action is the very action of the Holy Spirit

St. Maximilian sees Mary's ineffable union with the Holy Spirit from the very first instant of her conception as giving her a privileged place in God's saving plan. In keeping with what God has revealed in Scripture and Tradition regarding Mary's intercessory role in the order of grace, he says:

When we reflect on these two truths: that all graces come from the Father by the Son and the Holy Spirit; and that our Holy Mother Mary is, so to speak, one with the Holy Spirit, we are driven to the conclusion that this Most Holy Mother is indeed the intermediary by whom all graces come to us.

All of God's grace comes to us through Mary's intercession. This is the "descending" order of grace. For Kolbe, there is a corresponding "ascending" order; for Mary, she is our means for going to God: "Do not doubt that her will is entirely united to God's will. It is a matter, then, of uniting our will to hers, and thus we will be united to God through her."

St. Maximilian Kolbe's understanding of Mary as a "quasi-incarnation of the Holy Spirit" has sparked theological debate because it treads close to speculative territory that risks confusion between creature and Creator, and misrepresents the personhood and role of the Holy Spirit. The main arguments against Kolbe's view—particularly from Eastern Orthodox and Protestant perspectives—can be grouped under several key concerns:

1. Confusion of Persons: Mary ≠ the Holy Spirit

Theological Concern: Kolbe's language can be read to blur the line between Mary as a created human being and the Holy Spirit as uncreated, divine, and consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

- Kolbe's view described Mary as the "spouse" of the Holy Spirit and went further to suggest that she was so perfectly united to Him that she could be seen as a "quasi-incarnation."
- Critics argue this undermines the distinction between divine and human nature, potentially suggesting a fourth person in the Trinity or a second incarnation, which is doctrinally unacceptable.

2. No Second Incarnation

Orthodox and Protestant teaching affirms that the only incarnation is that of the Second Person of the Trinity—the Son of God, in Jesus Christ.

- The term "quasi-incarnation" implies something like another hypostatic union.
- Even if Kolbe meant this metaphorically, such language risks heresy (Theopaschitism, Mariolatry) because it suggests that Mary embodies or manifests the Holy Spirit in a manner unique and salvific.

Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky warned against any suggestion that would imply that the Virgin Mary participates in the divine essence rather than being a holy, graced creature.

3. Misunderstanding the Holy Spirit's Role

From a Trinitarian standpoint:

- The Holy Spirit is not incarnated but indwells believers.
- Mary is the Theotokos (God-bearer), but she is not the vehicle of the Spirit's own embodiment, nor the "body" through which the Spirit is made visible.

Eastern Orthodoxy particularly emphasises the unknowability and concealment of the Holy Spirit, often highlighting Pentecost and the Eucharist as primary signs of His presence, rather than Mary.

4. Risk of Exaggerated Marian Devotion (Mariolatry)

Both Protestant and some Eastern Orthodox theologians warn that Kolbe's formulation could:

- Promote a quasi-divine status for Mary, which is not grounded in Scripture or apostolic tradition.
- Lead to devotion that shifts from Christ to Mary, undermining the sufficiency of Christ's mediation (cf. 1 Tim 2:5).

This concern is especially strong among Reformed Protestants, who reject any theological or devotional move that appears to elevate Mary beyond the bounds of biblical revelation.

5. Non-Scriptural Language and Speculation

Kolbe's terminology does not have scriptural or patristic precedent and appears to originate in his own spiritual and mystical theology, not the authoritative teaching of the Church.

- **Protestant reformers (e.g., Calvin, Luther) stressed that doctrine must be founded upon clear Scriptural testimony.**
- **Even the Roman Catholic Church does not endorse Kolbe's "quasi-incarnation" terminology in official magisterial teaching.**

How the Roman Catholic Church Has Responded

While Kolbe is canonised and honoured as a saint and martyr, his writings on Mary and the Holy Spirit are treated as private theological reflection, not binding doctrine. The Church recognises his deep Marian devotion but does not teach that Mary is a quasi-incarnation of the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic Church honours Kolbe as a saint and martyr, but does not officially teach that Mary is a "quasi-incarnation" of the Holy Spirit. His writings on this point are considered personal theological reflections, not doctrine.

Kolbe's view on Marian Theology

Kolbe's Quasi-Incarnational View	Traditional Orthodox & Protestant Teaching
Mary is the 'Spouse of the Holy Spirit' in such a unique way that she becomes a quasi-incarnation.	Mary is the human mother of Jesus, filled with grace, but not divine or an incarnation of the Spirit.
Mary's union with the Holy Spirit is seen as so complete that some describe it as a second, lesser incarnation.	There is only one incarnation: Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity.
Kolbe's language reflects mystical devotion and Marian consecration, not official doctrine.	Orthodox and Protestant theologians reject any suggestion that Mary shares in the divine essence.
Used to inspire fervent devotion and spiritual warfare against secularism and Freemasonry.	The Holy Spirit is not incarnated but indwells all believers through baptism and faith.
Seen as a poetic expression of Mary's purity and receptivity to divine will.	Raises concerns of confusion between Creator and creature, and risk of Mariolatry.

Types of Freemasonry in Europe

Grand Lodge Freemasonry (UGLE, Australia, etc.)	Continental Freemasonry (Grand Orient, Latin Countries)
Belief in a Supreme Being is required; oaths are taken on a sacred text.	Belief in God not required; accepts atheists. Oaths may be symbolic or civic.
Strictly avoids discussion of religion and politics in lodge meetings.	Frequently engages in political and religious discussions.
Aims for personal moral development, charity, and civic virtue.	Focuses on social reform, enlightenment, and secular values.
Emphasises religious neutrality and spiritual symbolism.	Often actively secular or anticlerical (e.g., French laïcité).
Recognised as 'regular' by UGLE and affiliates.	Not recognised by UGLE or Freemasonry Australia (considered 'irregular').
Prevalent in UK, Australia, Canada, India, and USA.	Prevalent in France, Belgium, Italy, and Latin America.

Kolbe vs Freemasonry

Kolbe's View	Contemporary Catholic Teaching
Freemasonry is a direct enemy of the Church and Christ, associated with satanic influence.	Freemasonry is incompatible with Catholic doctrine due to its relativism and naturalism, not labelled satanic.
Kolbe used militant and apocalyptic language, emphasising Mary's victory over Satan.	Modern Church teaching avoids dramatic language, focusing on theological incompatibility.
Formed the Militia Immaculatae to counter Freemasonry through spiritual warfare and Marian consecration.	The Church teaches that Catholics may not join Masonic groups (CDF, 1983) and calls for pastoral care.
Viewed Freemasonry as intentionally anti-Catholic and destructive.	Focus is on Freemasonry's principles, not on judging the intentions of individuals.
Freemasonry blasphemes and denies revealed truth.	Freemasonry promotes a naturalistic worldview that undermines divine revelation.

Australian Church Views on Freemasonry

Catholic Church in Australia	Anglican Church of Australia
Based on Vatican 2023 reaffirmation: Catholics may not join Masonic lodges.	No national policy; some dioceses address Freemasonry locally.
Dioceses expected to implement pastoral catechesis and doctrinal clarity.	Sydney Diocese Synod (2003) declared Freemasonry incompatible with Christianity.
Emphasizes incompatibility of Masonic naturalism and relativism with Catholic faith.	Sydney Synod urges Anglicans to resign from lodges to affirm exclusive allegiance to Christ.
Catechesis focuses on spiritual risks and doctrinal divergence.	No General Synod canon or national guideline on Freemasonry.
Official and binding across all Australian Catholic dioceses.	Responses vary by diocese; Sydney is the strongest in its stance.

Other major opinions re compatibility of Freemasonry

Denomination / Tradition	Official Teaching / Position
Eastern Orthodox Churches	Strongly prohibit Freemasonry; considered incompatible with Orthodox doctrine.
Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)	Critical of Masonic practices but allows membership by individual conscience.
Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)	Prohibits membership; grounds for church discipline.
Reformed Presbyterian (RPCNA)	Strongly opposed; Freemasonry considered a false religion.
Free Methodist / Wesleyan Church	Prohibits Freemasonry; seen as conflicting with Christian doctrine.
United Methodist Church (UMC)	No official ban; local conferences express concern.
Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod / WELS	Explicitly prohibit Freemasonry; incompatible with Lutheran doctrine.
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)	No formal position; varies by region.
Anglican Church (Sydney Diocese)	Strong opposition; incompatible with Christian faith.
Church of England	No official ban; some bishops express concern.

Saint, Reformer, Influencer or Disrupter?

SAINT	REFORMER	INFLUENCER	DISRUPTER
Martyr	Franciscan Missionary to Rome, Poland and Japan	Established all modes of media as a means to propagate and build the Militia Immaculata.	Formed MI to take on not only Freemasonry, but also to be an aggressive form of evangelism
STD: Doctor of Sacred Theology, Ph.D	Pushed for a new rule to be incorporated into the OSF to enable the MI to be a core Franciscan mission.	In establishing communities in Poland and Japan, following the principles of not using the spoken word by example	challenged Fascism, Freemasonry, protestantism and the teachings of the likes of Bruno as being inherently evil
Appearance of the BVM	Called for a stronger emphasis and dedication to the BVM, drawing on the Platonic and Aristotelian teachings of the early Renaissance Church.	insisted that any development of buildings and the like must follow the strictest and safest practices	Deemed not only a threat to Mussolini but also the rising tide of Nazism
Faithful to Prayer	Created a new standard in literature and media	Persistent writer of journals and letters to people in authority, secular and clerical	would hide, transport, and look out for people being persecuted by the Nazis, particularly in Poland
Offered his place for another	Challenged the status quo of the cruelty within the Auschwitz prison	Used his status as a priest to not only convert others to dedication to BVM, but also from Judaism to Catholicism	was criticised for the proselytisation of Jews, Muslims, as well as Freemasons.
Died by lethal injection on August 14, 1941	Eve of the Annunciation was to be appropriate for the cause to maintain his teachings	His cremation on August 15th, given his devotion to MI and the 'pseudo-incarnation' heresy gained further traction	The Catholic Church reviewed Bruno's teaching, and along with Galileo, John Paul II apologised for Bruno's martyrdom, but did not extend the same "personal thoughts" defence as that extended to Kolbe