

New Series  
Volume 3  
No. 2  
November  
2023



Pages 1-22

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**Title:** Elizabeth Kindelmann and the Devotion to the Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: Historical, Liturgical and Theological Reflections

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#### **Abstract**

After examination by a theological commission, the spiritual diary of a prayerful Catholic woman, Elizabeth Kindelmann (1913-1985), were approved by Cardinal Erdo of Hungary in 2009. Her spiritual messages based on inner locutions from Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary contain the so-called *Devotion to the Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*. The work and spirituality of the *Flame of Love Movement* was blessed by Pope Francis in 2013. Kindelmann said that the prayers and devotions revealed to her would 'blind Satan' and inaugurate a new era of faith for humanity. Examining the spiritual phenomena associated with her life, and the devotion itself, I will relate them to the scriptures and to wider liturgical, historical, and cultural issues. I intend to develop and deepen theological reflection on their content and significance and foster a greater awareness of Kindelmann and the *Flame of Love Devotion* among a scholarly audience.

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## Introduction

On 6 June 2009, in Budapest, Hungary, the spiritual diaries of a prayerful Catholic woman, Elizabeth Kindelmann (nee Szanto) were approved by Cardinal Archbishop Peter Erdo after examination by a commission set up to investigate their contents and other related ecclesiastical documentation. This spiritual message containing the so-called *Devotion to the Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* has spread worldwide among a small but significant group of devotees but is still relatively little known by Christians outside of Hungary.<sup>1</sup>

With religious phenomena such as those reported here, we observe that similar tropes and themes recur.<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Kindelmann's experiences follow a familiar pattern to those reported in the lives of other mystics and saints who have claimed private revelations. These spiritual experiences include exhortations to the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Kindelmann reported teachings from Jesus Christ and Mary his mother, and their joint desire to save humanity from present spiritual perils on earth, and the danger of eternal perdition. She also refers to the unfolding of future events in which humanity will have to decide for God and Mary. She spoke of Satan, identified as a personal spiritual agent of deception and moral evil. Kindelmann said that the prayers and devotions revealed by Jesus and Mary were to be adopted and applied so that these dangers and deceptions would be avoided, challenged, and eradicated.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Kindelmann, *The Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: The Spiritual Diary*, Eng. trans., Canada: The Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Inc., 2nd edn, 2019 [hereafter, *The Spiritual Diary*]. See also, Elizabeth Kindelmann, *The Flame of Love: The Spiritual Diary*, [an abridged version, hereafter, *The Flame of Love*], Philadelphia: Flame of Love Movement, 2020. The following biographical details and quotations from Kindelmann's diaries are taken from these definitive sources.

<sup>2</sup> See Chris Maunder, 'Apparitions of Mary', in *Mary the Complete Resource*, Sarah Jane Boss, (ed.), London/New York, Continuum, 2007), pp.424-457; Michael O'Carroll, 'Apparitions', in *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc., rev. ed., 1986, pp.47-48.

<sup>3</sup> Within the context of an interdisciplinary journal, the following methodology will be applied to this study: when presenting Kindelmann's experiences, it is important to note that reports of what was said to the subject by Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary are presented from a phenomenological perspective. I treat the data found in her diaries at face value. It should not be inferred that the author accepts the authenticity or veracity of all reported phenomena, nor that the author seeks to promote this religious devotion. The main intention is to present Kindelmann's message to others for their assessment. As a Catholic, the author has sympathy with Kindelmann's message. The Catholic Church is the competent authority in any final theological judgement as to

Examining these reported inner locutions, the spiritual phenomena associated with her life, and the devotion itself, I will relate them to the scriptures and to wider liturgical, historical, and cultural issues. I wish to develop and deepen reflection on their content and theological significance and foster a greater awareness of Kindelmann and the *Flame of Love Devotion* among a scholarly audience.

### **The Life of Elizabeth Kindelmann**

Kindelmann was born in Kispest, Budapest on 6 January 1913. Orphaned at an early age, she worked several low paid jobs to make a living, and before her marriage explored a vocation with the Carmelites. She was rejected on grounds of poor health. She married Carol Kindelmann, a tradesman, in 1930 and had six children. Her husband died in 1946. She lived in difficult circumstances. In post-war Communist Hungary, she worked in factories undertaking manufacturing jobs, thereby earning enough to support her family.

Amid these difficulties, she reported the temptation to abandon her Christian faith, but persevered. She became an associate lay Carmelite and sought to put the messages she received into practice, assisted by her spiritual directors and advisers, her family, and friends, and especially Mrs. Angela Hamori with whom she prayed and received holy communion daily. Elizabeth was regarded as a devoted mother and a woman of prayer and charity.<sup>4</sup> Her personal sanctity was attested to by many priests and lay people who knew her personally, including Monsignor George Tuto.<sup>5</sup>

In 1983, Kindelmann was diagnosed with cancer and consequently, died in 1985. Mrs. Hamori related how before she died Elizabeth was told of the nature of her death by Jesus and Mary. They told her that she would die without the presence of family or friends. Rather, they promised that they would be with her at the end to look after her. She died peacefully,

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the nature, authenticity, veracity, and spiritual efficacy of this devotion. Each reader is encouraged to form their own opinion.

<sup>4</sup> *The Flame of Love*, p.46.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Interview with Msgr. Tuto and Mrs Hamori on privately produced video *The Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and The Biography of Elizabeth Kindelmann*, produced by Robert Doyle. I am grateful to Robert Doyle for allowing me to use this source. I follow his chronology and his selection of the messages referenced.

but, as foretold, without her family and friends being present. She was buried first at Erd, and then later her body was transferred to Kispest.<sup>6</sup>

### **A Brief Overview of the Central Aspects of the Reported Locutions and Spiritual Messages**

Between 1961 and her death in 1985, Elizabeth experienced a series of aural and intellectual phenomena referred to as 'inner locutions'. Shared initially only with her confessor, she reported messages and teachings given by Jesus and Mary. These were recorded in her spiritual diary. Chris Maunder notes:

In many cases, messages are passed on through the visionary to the wider faith community. Sometimes the perception is aural only, and it is then categorized as a locution. Visions and locutions are very common in the population at large, and certainly among religious people.<sup>7</sup>

Elizabeth was told that she was chosen to be messenger of the *Flame of Love Devotion* because she understood suffering and poverty, and because she was a loving mother. Mary identified herself as a kind and loving mother and said that she desired every human heart to become her shrine, full of love, where, as in the case of Elizabeth, her love might become effective.

Kindelmann began her diary on 13 July 1960. She describes several religious experiences, including periods of overwhelming spiritual dryness and near despair between the years 1958 and 1961. Her first locution from Jesus Christ was in July 1961. In 1962, the Virgin Mary asked that the *Flame of Love Devotion* be known throughout the world. Subsequently, over the next twenty years, the Virgin and Christ spoke many times.

On 13 April 1962, the Virgin Mary spoke for the first time:

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<sup>6</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, pp. vii-xvi. Source: Interview with Mrs. Angela Hamori on privately produced video *The Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and The Biography of Elizabeth Kindelmann*, Robert Doyle.

<sup>7</sup> See Chris Maunder, 'Apparitions of Mary', p.424. See also, Chris Maunder, 'Mary of the visionaries: Wisdom from the Mouths of the "Uncultured"', in *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies*, Volume 3, Issue 1, 2023, pp.1-17.



I would like to place into your hands a new instrument...it is the flame of love of my [immaculate] heart...with this flame full of graces that I give you from my heart, ignite all the hearts in the entire country. Let this flame go from heart to heart. This is the miracle becoming the blaze whose dazzling light will blind Satan. This is the fire of love of union which I obtained from the heavenly Father through the merits of the wounds of my divine son.<sup>8</sup>

On several occasions, Jesus reiterated that his immaculate mother's flame of love was to modern people what the Ark was to Noah; for example, in the spring of 1981, Jesus said: "the Flame of Love of the heart of my mother is Noah's Ark".<sup>9</sup> From a theological perspective, these words imply that the flame of love of the immaculate heart of Mary is the only means, as was Noah's Ark, of deliverance and salvation for the human race. Some may recoil at this, but the teaching was qualified on 31 August 1962. On that occasion, Mary said that her immaculate heart's flame of love 'is Jesus Christ himself'<sup>10</sup>, confirming that Jesus Christ is the true Savior and Redeemer of humanity, the Ark of deliverance and salvation. He is the flame of love which resides in Mary's heart.

The messages contain cautions and warnings. During the final recorded locution on 12 December 1981, Mary said:

My little one and all my beloved children, be on the alert, Satan wants to remove the ground of hope from beneath your feet. He knows very well that if he succeeds in doing this, he will have removed everything from your souls. A soul which loses hope is ready to commit sin. If you lose hope, he does not even need to tempt you to sin. He who has lost hope is in terrible darkness. He no longer sees with the eyes of faith. For him, all virtue, everything that is good, loses its value. O my children, pray constantly for one another. Allow the outpouring of my graces to take effect in your souls.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus and Mary gave specific prayers to Elizabeth for use by her and the faithful, in the hope that Christ's wishes be fulfilled; they said that they would save the Church and the world and counter the spiritual and moral corruption that was evident everywhere. The Virgin said

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<sup>8</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.28.

<sup>9</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.294.

<sup>10</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.78.

<sup>11</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.295.

that these prayers would be powerfully effective in these dark times. On one occasion, she said that it was Jesus Christ's wish that every soul had that intimate spiritual relationship with him that Elizabeth Kindelmann had. I will discuss these prayers in a later section.

Christ asked her to give up all she had and to become entirely dependent upon the support of her children. Elizabeth renounced the world, even to the last wooden spoon, as the Hungarian saying goes. Her residence was a small room made available for her use, part of a former bakehouse near a church where she lived and prayed and where many of her spiritual experiences took place.

In 1971, Christ explained to her the importance of the role of the clergy. Jesus said:

Get the timid and passive priests to leave their homes. They must not stand idle and deprive humanity of the Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of my Mother. Let them not abuse the confidence by which I have bonded them to me. They must speak out and announce my abundant riches, so I can pour out my forgiveness on the whole world.<sup>12</sup>

He advocated utter dependence on Mary:

Trust in my mother: She wipes away all doubts and removes fear by her boundless, motherly love. She marks you with a sign and will protect those who trust her. If you trust her, the depraved [Satan] will be humiliated and thrown into the depth of hell. The future of the world is in preparation: The smile of my mother will light the whole world.<sup>13</sup>

On 6 December 1964, the Virgin Mary announced, in words reminiscent of those of Matthew 11:25, that a miracle would be wrought by the devotion and its associated prayers, such that it would astonish scholars and intellectuals:

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<sup>12</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.284.

<sup>13</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.284.



I will perform a miracle that the scientists will try to imitate to no avail, being completely beyond their power. Only the wisdom of the pure and God-loving souls will be able to understand.<sup>14</sup>

On 15 August 1980, Jesus reportedly said:

The whole Church and the whole world are in grave danger. Even with your strength, you cannot change this situation. The Holy Trinity alone can help you, through the concerted intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin, all the angels, all the saints, and those souls...freed from Purgatory.<sup>15</sup>

The Virgin taught that the effect of the *Flame of Love Devotion* would change the course of human history, a phenomenon often referred to by the mystics as the triumph of the Immaculate Heart.

### **Mary's Requests: The Pope, The Feast, *The Hail Mary* and *The Unity Prayer***

On 4 May 1962, the Virgin requested that the Church institute a feast celebrating the *Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, to be held annually on the Feast of the Presentation on 2 February:

On the Feast of Candlemas, my beloved sons [bishops and the clergy] will introduce the Flame of Love of my heart in procession, so that in such fashion, it becomes a living fire in their hearts, and souls. Everything must be prepared in such a way that it spreads like wildfire. Let those souls I have chosen do everything to prepare for the great mission ahead... [Kindelmann goes on to say] between May 3 and 11, the Blessed Virgin told me four times not to neglect her command.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.236.

<sup>15</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.291.

<sup>16</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, pp.39-40.

On 3 September 1962 Mary asked that the pope proclaim the devotion of the *Flame of Love* to the entire world:

Tell your spiritual director of my desire. In turn, he must bring my cause to the Primate Bishop of your country, and then to the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of my Divine Son on earth. There has never been a time of grace like this since the Word became Flesh. Blinding Satan will shake the world.<sup>17</sup>

Eventually, in 1977 Kindelmann was able to visit Rome intending to relate the content of the message to Pope Paul VI. She made the journey accompanied by her confessor, Father Ferman, a theology professor, and a female friend, Dr A. Jako. Elizabeth had an introductory letter provided for her by a bishop.

Because of various setbacks, not least to do with the obstructive behavior of the Communist authorities in Hungary, as well as some personal challenges, Elizabeth failed in gaining a private audience with the pope, but she did manage to have a private meeting with a Hungarian priest, Father Mester, who worked within the Roman Curia. Mester was generous with his time, and she was able to relate the contents of her spiritual diary to him. Despite this important development in the history of the cause of the devotion, Elizabeth was not able to obtain further visas and was not allowed to travel to Rome again.

### **The Hail Mary**

The most striking aspect of the devotional prayers used by Kindelmann is the insertion of an extra phrase into the words of the *Hail Mary* prayer. The Virgin Mary requested this as early as October 1962, and again, according to the *Spiritual Diary*, on 2 February 1981. The prayer goes as follows:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners,

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<sup>17</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.79.





*spread the effect of grace of thy flame of love over all of humanity, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.*<sup>18</sup>

When we reflect upon the history of the prayer from a simple recitation of the *Angelic Salutation* found in Luke's Gospel, to the standard form used today, we witness a series of developments in the tradition. These have occurred at times for particular reasons, always guided by the authority of the hierarchical Church, usually, either to combat doctrinal error, or to articulate the truths of Christian faith more fully. Therefore, in principle, because the wording of the prayer has changed in the past, it is possible that the wording of the *Hail Mary* could change in the future. Of course, this principle excludes the possibility of omitting what has already been sanctioned or changing the sense of the prayer to mean something contrary to its initial intention.

The version of the *Hail Mary* used currently, and since its inclusion into the *Roman Breviary* by Pope Pius V in 1568, has not, and cannot be rescinded, and as it stands, within the Latin Rite, the prayer retains its current integrity, authority, and universality. Nevertheless, a phrase could be added to further deepen or elucidate that which is already contained;<sup>19</sup> and it appears that in the case of the supplementary wording shared by Kindelmann, this is intended. Further developments could occur, either at the discretion of the ecclesial hierarchy; gradually and indirectly through the exercise of the *sensus fidelium*; or through a claim to a direct supernatural intervention or request. Indeed, all these factors have led to such devotional developments in the past, and the *Flame of Love Devotion* could be one such instance. Whether the current form is superseded by the *Flame of Love* version, only time will tell. We have observed that this is the nature of devotional prayers and practices in the life and history of the Catholic Church.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.101. An alternative translation is: 'Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, send forth your flame of love's graceful effect into the whole human race, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.' [Eternal Father, Jesus Christ].

<sup>19</sup> Note, for example, the tradition of modifying the words of the Hail Mary in the eighteenth-century version of the prayer taught by the Lancashire priest Christopher Tootell, *Devotions to Jesus, Mary and Joseph: Grounded in God's Written Word*, London: 1723: 'Hail Mary, full of grace, our Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, and holy Joseph, spouse of the Mother of God, pray ye for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, that we may be imitators of you, as you were of Christ. Amen.' This was given an *imprimatur* by his religious superior, Bishop Bonaventure Giffard.

Kindelmann was initially reluctant even to record this request when it was first made in 1962: 'I kept it inside for a long time without daring to write it down.' When Elizabeth was asked in 1982, by a 'competent bishop', the question why the Hail Mary should be recited differently; Elizabeth answered that this was a petition requested by the Virgin Mary of the Lord. It was granted by the Lord, 'so that', in the words of Jesus, 'by its effect, humanity is converted'. The Virgin clarified the sense in which this addition should be understood, when she said to Elizabeth: 'I do not want to change the prayer by which you honor me, by this petition, I want rather to shake humanity. This is not a new prayer formula; it must be a constant supplication.'<sup>20</sup>

This exchange challenges the rather formalized way in which people tend to think of such ecclesial issues; one is reminded that the Virgin is addressing a dire spiritual and existential crisis, rather than discussing liturgical niceties.

### **The Unity Prayer**

Kindelmann relates a second prayer that has become known as the *Unity Prayer*. Again, she claimed that it was taught to her by Christ and the Virgin in May 1962, and that they requested its use by the faithful to bring about the aims of the *Flame of Love Devotion*. Of it, Jesus said: 'Through this prayer, Satan will be blinded, and souls will not be led into sin.'<sup>21</sup>

Theologically, the prayer articulates the mystery of *theosis*, and divine *perichoresis*, God's desire to dwell within his creatures, which will be fully realized in a finally redeemed humanity. The theological precondition of these prayers is at least threefold:

1. Due to the mystery of human iniquity, sin has brought a rupture to the union between God and Humanity that ought to exist untrammelled and must be restored fully in Christ.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.101.

<sup>21</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.43.



2. In the Person of Jesus Christ, a hypostatic union has been established between God and Humankind that once more restores right relations. By his Incarnation, his Earthly Ministry, his Passion, Cross and Resurrection, Christ the Sacrament of God, is the one through whom is achieved the perichoretic desire of God who yearns for human *theosis*.
3. As the mother of the Redeemer, and through the merits of the singular graces given to the Virgin Mary, she is uniquely involved in this mystery of salvation, justification, and sanctification. Christ wills that this mystery be understood more clearly, and that Mary be invoked in this spiritual struggle, which cannot be won without her participation as the *Theotokos*.

From a theological perspective, the prayer is rooted in and articulates a belief in the hypostatic union between God and Humanity present in the Divine Person of Jesus Christ. This mystery should not be overlooked or neglected. The profound spiritual truth witnessed to in this devotion is the union between Christ's human nature and human nature *per se*, the mystical relationship that exists between the soul of Christ and the soul of every human person. In theological terms, the *Unity Prayer* voices the supplication of every faithful human heart, but also expresses that holy desire within Christ's perfect human soul, that all human souls be in harmony with his in a perfect communion, so that through his divine action they may be brought to the Eternal Father.

When the soul opens itself to the presence and activity of Christ, present in the power of his Holy Spirit, the union that exists between Christ's human nature and humanity is revealed and activated. In baptism, the words of the rite encapsulate this mystery: 'you have become a new creation and have clothed yourself in Christ...bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven'.

The human nature shared in by each individual human person is hypostatically joined to that of Christ and is related to him through the perfect human nature of Mary the God-bearer. Through her singular grace-filled consent and moral agency, Mary cooperated with the Will of the Eternal Father, and of her Christ the God-Man was brought forth. The theological insight of the *Unity Prayer* is a reminder to believers that the hypostatic union of

the God-Man and humanity takes place in each human soul, but first of all in Mary's soul. Kindelmann urged the faithful to use this prayer:

My adorable Jesus may our feet journey together.

May our hands gather in unity

May our hearts beat in unison

May our souls be in harmony

May our thoughts be as one

May our ears listen to the silence together

May our glances profoundly penetrate one another

May our lips pray together to gain mercy from the Eternal Father. Amen.<sup>22</sup>

There are many eucharistic, liturgical and devotional resonances and allusions to be found in the deep structures of this prayer. The Prophet Isaiah 52.7 proclaims: 'How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news'; that is Christ, who brings forth his gospel. The first line reminds one of the conclusion of the daily recitation of the *Benedictus* Lk. 1.68-79. When the members of the Church's faithful pray that Jesus, identified as Messiah, guide their feet into the ways of peace they pray that they may be led to the fullness of the gospel life in Christ. This is evocative too of the Marian image of the Virgin *Hodegetria*, pointing the way on the road to those who seek Christ.

The second line speaks of the ancient prayer posture, the *orans*, assumed by bishop and presbyter in imitation of Christ the high priest at the celebration of the daily Eucharist, especially during the Collect, when the hands of the priest gather the faithful to the Altar of the Lord. The celebrant extends his hands in supplication gesturing the call to the unity of humanity in Christ. This *orans* posture is often portrayed in icons of the Virgin herself.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.43.



The third line implores Christ that he fulfils the purpose of the Sacred Heart devotion. Christians pray that their hearts be brought into harmony with his, burning with fervent love for God and a zeal for the salvation of humanity, as Mary's Immaculate Heart is disposed and ordered towards the heart of her son.

The fourth line resonates with the desire of the Christian to take on what Pauline theology calls the 'mind of Christ',<sup>23</sup> a truth articulated in the Devotion to the Sacred Head of Christ as the Seat of Divine Wisdom.<sup>24</sup> By virtue of her role as obedient servant of the Word of God and Mother of the Divine Wisdom, Mary has, in all things, the 'mind of Christ'.

The fifth and sixth lines take one back to the initial words of the prayer, 'My adorable Jesus'. The desire for the ears of Christ and the devotee to listen to the silence together, and for the glances of Christ and his adorer to penetrate one another are a call to Divine Worship and to adoration of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Eschatologically, they speak of the beatific vision.

The final line speaks of devotion to the Divine Mercy of Jesus, whose body, blood, soul, and divinity is offered to the Eternal Father as the only acceptable offering that can be made for humanity's salvation.<sup>25</sup> According to the Catholic understanding, it is in the daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and through eucharistic adoration, the faithful recitation of the Divine Office, and through those fervent devotions attached to the liturgical celebrations of the feasts of the Lord and the Blessed Virgin that the Church finds its identity in Christ, its pattern of prayer and the graces necessary for the sustenance of its life in this world and its eternal redemption in the next.

To be understood correctly, the *Unity Prayer* can and must be read Mariologically, from the perspective of the Virgin Mary herself. If one reads the prayer as though it were being spoken by Mary, as she addresses Jesus, her Son and Savior, one is given a profound spiritual insight: one enters the inner dynamics of their unique and saving relationship, their mutuality and undivided unity of identity, purpose, and mission. The prayer also has a

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<sup>23</sup> Phil. 2. 5-8.

<sup>24</sup> See, Lady Cecil Kerr, *Teresa Helena Higginson Servant of God: The Spouse of the Crucified*, Leominster: Gracewing, 2008, *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> See, Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in my Soul: A Diary*, Massachusetts: Marian Press, 2005.

resonance with the *Magnificat*, the prayer of the universal Church found in Lk. 1.46-55 in which Mary addresses God directly.

In terms of identity: Mary's human nature most perfectly conforms to the human nature of her son. Hers is an immaculate nature from the very beginning of her existence, her conception, free from original and actual sin. She bore the Eternal Word in her immaculate heart and in her immaculate womb, that is, in her whole being, body, soul, mind and spirit. In terms of purpose: her purpose is singular, to do the will of her Divine Son, which is the will of the Eternal Father. In terms of mission: her mission is no less than to bring to its eternal consummation, in union with her son, the entire gospel plan of God's salvation for humanity. Where she has already gone and what has already been achieved in her both by God's grace and by virtue of her own merits, the rest of humanity must do and be also. In the revelation given to Kindelmann on 17 May 1963 Christ said to her: 'Let us have just one thought: the salvation of souls.'<sup>26</sup>

The prayer is a perfect embodiment of the Catholic dictum 'to Jesus, through Mary'. Each believer is called to place themselves in the perspective of Mary and to pray that they be conformed to Christlikeness as she is. The patristic concept of *perichoresis*, speaks of the mutual in-dwelling and ontological interpenetration of each of the Persons of the Holy Trinity in love for one another; by virtue of the Incarnation, this *perichoresis* is extended to humanity through Jesus and in a related sense, his mother Mary.

The Triune God desires to dwell entirely in each human heart. This desire, expressed in the words of the prayer, that the very being of God in Christ and the human soul, 'profoundly penetrate each other', is already realized in the life of the Virgin Mary because of her singular graces. That humanity might become as she is and achieve that which is already present in its fullness in her, is the supreme object of this devotion.

The circumincession of the divine and human is exemplified most clearly in the complementary devotions, in the Eudian sense, to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Within the context of the *Flame of Love Devotion* the circumincession is proclaimed as the possibility and desired end for all humanity: 'May our hearts beat in unison' (*Unity Prayer*).

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<sup>26</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.152.



Mary said, 'my immaculate heart's flame of love is Jesus Christ himself.' The graceful effect of the flame of love of Mary's Immaculate Heart is no less than the impartation of the fullness of the redemptive and saving action of Jesus Christ into the hearts and souls of human beings.

## **The Liturgical Prayers associated with the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

### **The Assumption and the *Missale Romanum* 1951**

According to my own research and theological reflection, the terminology and conceptual framework of the *Flame of Love Devotion* had a liturgical context in the Sacred Liturgy of the Latin Rite prior to Elizabeth Kindelmann having her religious experiences. In the wake of the solemn proclamation by Pope Pius XII of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1950, there emerged a new liturgical prayer within the *Proper of the Mass for the Solemnity of the Assumption*. The *Missale Romanum* of 1920 contained two proper prayers for the *Feast of the Assumption*: one for the *Vigil Mass* and one for the *Mass of the Day*. In 1951, the version of the *Missale Romanum* contains a new proper for the *Mass of the Day*. Seemingly, this new proper prayer was commissioned to celebrate the promulgation of the dogmatic statement. Fascinatingly, this prayer displays a mysterious correspondence with the theological content of Kindelmann's inner locutions that began a decade later.

The version of the *Missale Romanum* promulgated in 1951, was the first to carry this new series of proper prayers for the *Mass during the Day* for the Assumption. The *Secreta* of the Mass, then celebrated in the Latin Tridentine Form, which since the liturgical reforms of the 1960s is referred to as the *Super Oblata* or *Prayer over the Offerings*, reads as follows:

Ascéndat ad te, Domine nostrae devoti6nis oblatio, et, beatissima Virgine Maria in caelum assúpta intercedénte, corda nostra, caritátis igne succénsa, ad te iúgiter adspirent. Per Christum Dominum Nostrum. Amen. [May this oblation, our tribute of homage, rise up to you O Lord, and through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom you have assumed into Heaven, may our hearts, aflame with the fire of love, constantly long for you. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.]

This prayer remained unchanged in the Latin version, the so-called *Editio Typica*, of the 1962 *Missale Romanum* of Pope John XXIII, and even remained unchanged in the Latin version of the *Missale Romanum* of Pope Paul VI in 1970, which was produced in the aftermath of the extensive liturgical reform that followed the Second Vatican Council.<sup>27</sup> The English translation I use here is from the new official English translation of the *Roman Missal* promulgated by Benedict XVI in 2010. It is interesting to note that the English translation of the *Roman Missal* by ICEL that was used between 1973 and 2010, obliterates the sense of the Latin of Pius XII completely: 'Lord, receive this offering of our service. You raised the Virgin Mary to the glory of heaven. By her prayers, help us to seek you and to live in your love'.

The new English translation, for the first time for those unfamiliar with the Latin, restores an appreciation of the theological richness of this prayer, and the sense that was meant when it was produced in the pontificate of Pius XII. It allows us also to see the clear correspondence that exists between it and the prayers given to Kindelmann.

The expression introduced into the *Hail Mary* by Kindelmann, at the request of the Virgin - 'spread the effect of grace of thy flame of love over all of humanity'- enters into a reciprocal relationship with the aspiration of the priest and the faithful, when in the *Mass During the Day* of the Assumption they say: 'O Lord...may our hearts, aflame with the fire of love, constantly long for you'. The prayer expresses that all the Christian faithful desire (constantly long) to be aflame with the love of Christ himself, as Mary is. The prayer teaches that this will be achieved solely through the intercession of Mary, and never apart from it. This plea, through the intercession of the Holy Virgin, corresponds with the desire that she send forth the flame of love from her own immaculate heart into the hearts of all human persons. It suggests a supplication that she who is by Christ's Divine Will, the Mediatrix of all Graces, be a perfect embodiment of the desire of the redeemed human race to achieve salvation and perfection in God, and that she may make herself both a model to imitate and be the means through which the actual impartation of grace into the human heart may be effected.

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<sup>27</sup> In fact, the 1970 *Missale Romanum* retained the *Mass of the Day* promulgated by Pope Pius XII in 1951, but included a new proper for the prayers of the *Vigil Mass*.





According to Catholic dogmatic principles and the logic of the *Flame of Love* message, in the mystical order of divine grace, Mary is the person chosen by Christ to secure the impartation of this saving grace and charism into the hearts of humanity. We are reminded of the words of the Second Vatican Council:

We have but one Mediator...The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. For all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on men originate, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. They flow forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rest on his mediation, depend entirely on it, and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather they foster this union. <sup>28</sup>

That this devotion should have arisen in the years following the infallible promulgation of the Assumption and during the Second Vatican Council, those two historic events in the life of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century, is surely significant. One may speculate, theologically, that the proclamation of the dogma, a teaching that pertained to public revelation, and right belief, created the context for the understanding of this private revelation in the realm of prayer and right worship. The Ecumenical Council beautifully describes the theology that underpins both.

The original inspiration for the creation of the wording of the liturgical prayer we find in the *Secreta* or *Super Oblata* is unknown and requires further historical research. I have found nothing in print. It is certainly novel and seems to have been composed afresh to mark such a momentous spiritual event. It does not seem to draw on anything that existed in the *Roman Missal* prior to 1950, or to any Eastern prayers that I am aware of. As one compares the resonances that occur between the prayer of the 1951 Missal and the prayers given to Kindelmann, one cannot but be struck by the mystery of their correspondence, and by the confirmation of the theological dictum, '*lex orandi - lex credendi, lex credendi – lex orandi*'.

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<sup>28</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), article 60, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott SJ, (ed.), London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967, pp.90-91.

## The request for a Feast of the Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

On 1 August 1962, the Virgin asked that the Church institute a feast celebrating the *Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, to be held annually: 'I ask the Holy Father to make the Feast of the Flame of Love on 2 February, Candlemas day. I do not want a special feast.'<sup>29</sup>

### (A) Theological-Historical Context

A brief historical survey provides some theological context and creates several theological insights into the *Flame of Love Devotion* and its deep links with Candlemas. Firstly, the Latin Rite has celebrated the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord since the pontificate of Sergius I in the late seventh century, when by papal decree he called for, 'a procession with a sung litany' to be celebrated on the four Marian Feasts of the Annunciation, Assumption, the Nativity of the Virgin and 'on the day which the Greeks call *Hypopante*'.<sup>30</sup>

Before the post-Vatican II liturgical reforms, the Feast was called 'The Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary [*In Purificatione B. Mariae Virginiae*]'. It was termed the *Hypopante* (lit. the *Encounter*) by the Greeks but is generally termed Candlemas in the English-speaking world. The feast, as the title suggests, is a 'Feast of the Lord', rather than a Marian Feast *per se* - a point clearly being made by the liturgical reformers - however, one might suggest that the confusion lies in the fact that because the feast commemorates an event from the Lukan Infancy Narratives, it can be understood as primarily a feast of the Lord, but also a feast of Mary. In terms of the dynamics of the theology of the *Flame of Love Devotion*, this is particularly, and uniquely, apt.

In the West, the feast was first celebrated by the Church of Rome. Later, it spread to the other parts of Western Europe, and in this sense, it is a venerable tradition of considerable antiquity. We are told that the Feast of the Presentation was associated from early times with the tradition of stational Masses and solemn candlelit processions characteristic of the faith of Roman Christians, and expressive of their communion with the Bishop of Rome. The feast

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<sup>29</sup> *The Spiritual Diary*, p.61.

<sup>30</sup> Alistair MacGregor, 'Candlemas: A Festival of Roman Origin', in Chris Maunder, (ed.), *The Origin of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, London: Burns and Oates, 2008, p.137.



ended the festivities associated with Christmastide and served to mark sacred time as a celebration forty days after the Nativity of Christ, and as a prelude, before the Lenten fast, to the greater festival of Eastertide.

The date of the feast was fixed from early times and has been kept piously ever since. In Rome, the feast was always associated with the person of the pope as Bishop of Rome and Universal Pastor, and with the Church of St Mary Major, as the proto-Marian Church of the Latin West. Because of the specific references to the pope, and a return to Mary in Kindelmann's messages, this link is especially intriguing.

The feast is of great significance in the development of Western Marian piety, in its papal, liturgical, and devotional forms. Because the candles to be used in the liturgies of the coming year were blessed on this occasion, particularly the candles used in Holy Baptism, Candlemas was truly a feast of light. Candlemas is associated not only with the theological understanding of Christ as the Light of the World, but also with the practical sacramental dimension of the Church's Sacred Liturgy. Indeed, whilst Easter is the major liturgical feast of light, Candlemas is the minor liturgical feast of light of the Western Church. Perhaps one might be so bold as to say that it became in the West a smaller Marian equivalent to Easter.

That a devotion to the flame of love of the immaculate heart of Mary - who is Jesus Christ himself - should be marked with a feast at Candlemas rather than with a new feast has great significance and resonates in several ways with the rich meaning of these other venerable liturgies and devotions.

The major festivals of light, such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost celebrate manifestations (lit. epiphanies) of the true identity of Jesus Christ as the God-Man; the minor festivals such as Candlemas, the Transfiguration and the other lesser feasts of the Lord follow the same pattern. We are reminded too that the Presentation of the Lord and these other feasts are remembered within the mysteries of the Holy Rosary. All are scriptural, and all are concerned with the divine mystery of the life, death and rising of Christ, with whom walks Mary his mother.

## **(B) Theological-Scriptural Context**

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord has as its proper gospel reading the account of the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple in Lk. 2.22-39. The biblical account of the Presentation of the Lord is intimately associated with the Virgin Mary, and with the biblical theological reflection on what would ultimately be referred to as her immaculate heart.

Simeon says to Mary that her soul shall be pierced with a sword. Luke's theology uses the concept of soul [*psukēn*] Lk. 2.35 and heart [*kardia*] Lk. 2.51 to explore Mary's ongoing personal participation in and meditation upon the mystery of the epiphany of divine light in the world – who is Jesus Christ. In Luke, heart and soul are distinct terms; though, of Mary, heart is never used in the literal, but rather one might say mystical sense: to mean her entire being or person.

In Luke, the heart and soul of Mary are related concepts. One is reminded of the words of the *Unity Prayer*: 'May our hearts beat in unison - May our souls be in harmony - May our thoughts be as one', and with the correspondence of these words in the *Shema Israel*, found in Luke's prelude to the Parable of the Good Samaritan Lk. 10.25-28, when the Lawyer asks of Christ: 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'; and after Jesus asks the man what is written in the Law, he answers: 'You shall love the Lord with all your heart [*kardias*], and with all your soul [*psukē*]...and with all your mind [*dianoia*]'.

Those words spoken by Simeon in the proper gospel of Candlemas, the *Nunc Dimittis* Lk. 2.29-32, speak of the Light of Christ, which is a light that both enlightens the Gentiles and gives glory to the people of Israel, this light is related to the flame of love of the immaculate heart and soul and mind of Mary his mother.

## **(C) Theological-Liturgical Context**

At Candlemas, certain liturgical elements of the Liturgy of Baptism and the Liturgy of Light at the Easter Vigil are echoed. At baptisms and at Easter, the faithful are presented with candles and renounce Satan and sin. In the liturgical actions of Candlemas, the procession with candles is itself the sign of the spreading of the light of Christ which has come into the world to dispel the darkness of death and the devil. Essentially, the bearing of light is itself the renunciation of sin. Therefore, Candlemas omits the mandatory renunciation of sin and



baptismal creed found in the other two liturgies, but joyfully celebrates a liturgy of light, not only by igniting candles, but by processing them in a sacred action.

The most ancient and beautiful antiphon of Candlemas found in the Tridentine liturgy has been retained in the New Rite. Again, the way in which this antiphon resonates with the message of the *Flame of Love Devotion* is striking:

Adorna thalamum tuum, Sio, et suscipe Regem Christum: amplectere Mariam, quae est caelestis porta: ipsa enim portat Regem gloriae novi luminis: subsistit Virgo, adducens manibus Filium ante luciferum gentium: quem accipiens Simeon in ulnas suas, praedicavit populis, Dominum eum esse vitae et mortis, et Salvatorem mundi [Sion, adorn your bridal chamber and welcome Christ the King; take Mary in your arms, who is the gate of heaven, for she herself is carrying the King of glory and new light. A Virgin she remains, though bringing in her hands the Son before the morning star begotten, whom Simeon, taking in his arms, announced to the peoples as Lord of life and death and Savior of the world].

The invitation to the world to ‘take Mary in your arms, who is the gate of heaven’ precisely follows the sense of Jesus Christ’s words to Kindelmann. The phrase, ‘for she herself is carrying the King of glory and new light’ encapsulates the theological idea that the light (the flame) carried by Mary in the depths of her immaculate heart, is Jesus Christ himself, the King of glory.

### **The *Flame of Love Devotion* and The Post-Vatican II Baptismal Liturgy**

The Tridentine Church used these words during the baptismal liturgy:

*Accipe lampadam ardentem, et irreprehensibilis custodi Baptismum tuum : serva Dei mandata, ut, cum Dominus venerit ad nuptias, possis occurrere ei una cum omnibus Sanctis in aula caelesti, et vivas in saecula saeculorum. Amen* [Take this burning light and keep true to your baptism throughout a blameless life. Keep the commandments of God; that when the Lord shall come like a bridegroom to the marriage feast, you, in company with all the saints, may meet him in the heavenly courts, and there live forever. Amen]

In the former rite, the emphasis was on the candle itself as a symbol of the light of Christ: *'Accipe lampadam'*. The words reminded those present of the importance of a sinless life and of the importance of keeping God's commandments, but also of the eschatological dimension of the coming of Christ the Bridegroom, who will lead the elect into the heavenly kingdom.

The post-Vatican II rite of baptism has a different but complementary theological emphasis. In the New Rite, as the celebrant hands the lighted baptismal candle to the newly baptized, he says: *'Lumen Christi accipiter* [Receive the Light of Christ]'. The emphasis here is not on that which symbolizes the Light of Christ, but on Christ himself, who is the Light. Hence, the wording. While retaining some similarities with the wording of the Old Rite, the New Rite is nevertheless much closer to the theological understanding portrayed in the message of the *Flame of Love Devotion*.

The following admonishment within the rite continues to express this Christological focus:

Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (She) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he (she) keep the flame of faith alive in his (her) heart. When the Lord comes, may he (she) go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.

The renewed theology of the post-Vatican II baptismal liturgy in the Latin Rite has deeper structural connections with the *Flame of Love Devotion* than does the previous rite, which considering a knowledge of Kindelmann's message, cannot fail to strike the theologian.

## **Conclusion**

By bringing Kindelmann's life and witness as well as the *Flame of Love Devotion* to the attention of a wider scholarly audience, I hope to stimulate interest and perhaps inspire other Mariologists to explore her life and teachings. Although the devotion has been given approval by the local hierarchy in Hungary, and in several other local jurisdictions, notably in Ecuador, it has not yet received full papal approval; although the work of the *Flame of Love Movement*



received a blessing from Pope Francis in 2013.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the papal blessing is a positive sign of its possible future acceptance.

Having examined some aspects of the *Flame of Love* message and devotion reported by Elizabeth Kindelmann, having explored the spiritual phenomena associated with her life, and having related these to some wider liturgical, historical-cultural, and scriptural issues, I have sought to deepen further reflection on their content and theological significance.

The inner coherence of Kindelmann's message and the *Flame of Love Devotion* and their correspondence with scripture and the wider history, culture and liturgy of the Church suggest an impressive theological consistency with the Catholic Church's teaching. The devotion weds together, within a hermeneutic of continuity, the beliefs and practices of the pre and post Vatican II Church. A personal theological judgement on the authenticity and veracity of Kindelmann's message is beyond the scope and intention of this particular study; however, one is reminded of the words of Archbishop Fulton Sheen when he notes that, 'nothing ever happens out of heaven except with a *finesse* of all details'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See *The Spiritual Diary*, for information on its acceptance in various countries around the world, pp.307-313; and the Papal Letter, in *The Flame of Love*, p.i-ii.

<sup>32</sup> Archbishop Fulton Sheen, 'Mary and the Muslims', in *The World's First Love*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952, p.155.