

THE FOURTH VOW OF OBEDIENCE TO THE POPE FOR MISSION IN LIGHT OF ELIZABETH A. JOHNSON'S WISDOM CHRISTOLOGY

KAUL KEEMPAT KETAATAN KEPADA PAUS UNTUK MISI DALAM CAHAYA KRISTOLOGI KEBIJAKSANAAN ELIZABETH A. JOHNSON

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji "kaul keempat ketaatan kepada Paus demi misi" dalam konteks tarekat religius perempuan, Kongregasi Yesus. Pendirinya, Mary Ward, menghendaki agar tarekatnya mengadopsi pola hidup dan spiritualitas yang sama dengan Serikat Yesus demi melayani dan menyebarkan iman Katolik secara aktif pada abad ketujuh belas. Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, ia mencita-citakan sebuah tarekat yang bebas dari aturan klausura (keterasingan dari dunia luar) maupun ketundukan kepada uskup setempat, serta hanya taat kepada Paus, sebagaimana yang dilakukan oleh kaum Yesuit. Namun, visi tersebut tidak sepenuhnya terwujud selama hampir empat abad akibat budaya seksisme yang dominan pada masa itu. Dalam Kapitel Umum tahun 2002, Kongregasi tersebut mengadaptasi Konstitusi Yesuit ke dalam aturan mereka sendiri, termasuk kaul keempat yang kemudian diberlakukan bagi seluruh anggota, sehingga memulihkan kembali jati diri misionernya. Artikel ini berupaya menafsirkan kembali makna kaul keempat melalui lensa Kristologi Elizabeth A. Johnson serta menggali relevansinya bagi Kongregasi saat ini. Melalui analisis historis dan teologis, artikel ini mengkaji makna awal kaul keempat dalam tradisi Ignasian, khususnya dalam kaitannya dengan pendirian Kongregasi oleh Mary Ward. Dengan mengacu pada Wisdom Christology karya Johnson, artikel ini menawarkan pemahaman baru mengenai kaul keempat sebagai panggilan menuju universalitas Yesus-Sophia yang lebih luas. Kristologi Johnson, yang menegaskan kemanusiaan seutuhnya serta partisipasi aktif perempuan dalam kehidupan Yesus, memberikan terang baru bagi pemahaman kaul keempat sebagai jalan menuju visi misi yang lebih inklusif dan transformatif.

Kata kunci: Elizabeth A. Johnson, feminis, inklusif, Ignasian, kaul keempat, ketaatan kepada Paus, Mary Ward, misi, universalitas, Wisdom Christology

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ABSTRACT

This article examines “the fourth vow of obedience to the Pope for missions” in the context of women religious, the Congregation of Jesus. Its foundress, Mary Ward, sought for her Institute to take the same form of life and spirituality of the Society of Jesus in order to actively serve and spread the Catholic faith in the seventeenth century. To achieve this goal, she envisioned her Institute free from enclosure and from subjection to local bishops, seeking obedience only to the Pope, as the Jesuits did. However, her vision was not fully realized for nearly four centuries due to the prevailing sexism of her time. At the General Chapter 2002, the Congregation adapted the *Jesuit Constitutions* to its own, including the fourth vow, which it extended to all members, reclaiming its missionary nature. This article seeks to reinterpret the meaning of the fourth vow through the lens of Elizabeth A. Johnson’s Christology and to explore its relevance for the Congregation today. Through historical and theological analysis, it examines the original meaning of the fourth vow in the Ignatian tradition, particularly in relation to Mary Ward’s foundation of the Congregation. By engaging Johnson’s Wisdom Christology, this article proposes a renewed understanding of the fourth vow as a call toward the greater universality of Jesus-Sophia. Her Christology, which affirms the full humanity and active participation of women in the life of Jesus, illuminates the fourth vow as a path to a more inclusive and transformative vision of mission.

Keywords: Elizabeth A. Johnson, feminist, Ignatian, inclusive, Mary Ward, mission, obedience to the Pope, the fourth vow, universality, Wisdom Christology

1. INTRODUCTION

The fourth vow of obedience to the Pope expresses the fundamental apostolic spirit of the Society of Jesus: to be sent anywhere in the world and dispersed throughout Christ’s vineyard. Designed by Ignatius and his companions, it is an explicit vow for mission, in addition to the traditional three vows. The *Jesuit Constitutions* [527] states its purpose as “to go anywhere His Holiness will order, whether among the faithful or the infidels, without pleading an excuse and without requesting any expenses for the journey.” With the objective of “helping souls,” the first Jesuits envisaged the Society as a missionary order with greater mobility and flexibility in ministry. This special vow obliges the Jesuits to be available and ready to be sent anywhere for mission (O’Malley, 2016).

While the first Jesuits’ international composition and experiences fostered in them a vision of the universal Church, their diverse backgrounds also led them to differing opinions regarding the locale of their future ministries. (O’Malley, 1983) To resolve the question of where best to serve, they turned to the Pope – the “universal pastor” of the entire harvest of Christ – who supposedly had better knowledge in all areas (de Aldama, 1990). Thus, the primary motivation behind the fourth vow was rooted in pastoral and practical concerns for mission. The intention of the fourth vow was concrete, directed toward mission, yet firmly grounded in their devotion to the papacy.

About a century later, in the seventeenth century, another group of religious envisioned serving for the universal good and being sent anywhere in the world by the Pope. This women-religious institute, the Congregation of Jesus (CJ), was founded in 1609 by Mary Ward, an Englishwoman. She sought for her Institute to take the same form of life and structure as the Society of Jesus. Unfortunately, her proposal was not accepted, and she could not receive papal approval during her lifetime. As the seventeenth-century Church required all women-religious to observe strict enclosure and remain under male authority, her Institute struggled for several centuries to fulfill her vision. Yet her sisters have survived in the same spirit as Mary Ward, without ceasing to engage in apostolic activities worldwide.

In contemporary Christology, feminist liberation Christology has recovered liberating elements within the Christian tradition and opens new possibilities for women's participation in the life and mission of the Church. In this light, the vow of obedience to the Pope, the vicar of Christ, may also be reappropriated for the sisters today in a more inclusive way. This article argues that Elizabeth A. Johnson's Wisdom Christology provides a theological framework for reinterpreting the fourth vow as an expression, for women, of the universal mission of Jesus-Sophia. Such a renewed interpretation offers fresh insights into how the Congregation may embody this vow in its mission today, with particular attention to the universal character of Jesus-Sophia.

2. METHOD

This study employs literature research, using a historical-theological methodology within a constructive theological framework. First, it examines the original meaning and significance of the fourth vow within the Ignatian tradition through historical analysis. It then explores Mary Ward's foundational vision and historical development of the fourth vow within her Institute. By comparing the Society and Mary Ward's Institute, this study identifies the historical limitations and theological possibilities for reinterpretation of the fourth vow in the context of the Congregation of Jesus.

Second, this study engages Elizabeth A. Johnson's inclusive Christology, particularly her Wisdom Christology, as a theological framework for reinterpretation. The primary resources include Johnson's *Redeeming the Name of Christ* (1995), *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (1992), and *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (2007). By rediscovering the Wisdom tradition, Johnson's Christology

offers an inclusive understanding of discipleship and mission, calling toward the greater universality of Jesus-Sophia.

Finally, this study adopts a constructive theological approach by bringing these historical and theological insights into dialogue with the contemporary mission of the Congregation of Jesus. Through the lens of Johnson's Wisdom Christology, it provides a renewed understanding of the fourth vow that remains faithful to Mary Ward's original missionary spirit while expanding its meaning to ontological and relational dimensions of universal mission.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF THE FOURTH VOW

3.1.1 The Fourth Vow in the Ignatian Context

For Ignatius, mission is the characteristic and principal foundation of the Society. On the fourth vow for mission, the original version of the *Formula* [7], updated in 1550, goes:

this special vow to carry out whatever the present and future Roman pontiffs may order which pertains to the progress of souls and the propagation of the faith; and to go at once, without subterfuge or excuse, as far as in us lies, ... whether they decide to send us among the Turks or any other infidels, even those who live in the regions called the Indies, or among any heretics whatever, or schismatics, or any of the faithful.

But why did the Society need a special vow when they already had the three common vows? In Ignatius' time, it was not clear whether the Pope had 'dominative power' over religious under the vow of obedience, just as their superiors had, or whether the papal authority was derived only from his universal jurisdiction applied to all faithful (de Aldama, 1990). It was generally assumed that the third vow of obedience covered all aspects of obedience. Yet the fourth vow, with a greater obligation, intensified and extended the commitment of the traditional third vow of obedience. Since the obligation of the third vow conforms to the rule of their religious order, religious are not bound to obey the Pope in matters of being sent to faraway countries and among the infidels and of traveling on foot without any expenses, because that would exceed their institute (Doiron, 1995). The fourth vow, however, specified obligations not explicitly covered by the third vow, thereby highlighting the goal of the Society.

Formula [4] lists the three purposes of the fourth vow as greater devotion in obedience to the Apostolic See, greater abnegation of our own wills, and surer direction from the Holy Spirit. John O'Malley (1983, p. 27) asserts that "it was far from that nineteenth-century

‘devotion to the Pope’ that first sprang up around Pius IX and has continued to our own day. The relationship between the Jesuits and the Pope was mutually advantageous.” He argues that the third purpose of ‘surer direction from the Holy Spirit’ was what originally motivated the vow, while the other two were somehow related and even subsidiary to it. Because the first Jesuits were primarily engaged in pastoral and spiritual concerns, Ignatius endeavored to realize the Society’s goal more concretely through obedience to “Christ on earth.”

According to O’Malley (1983), the fourth vow was significant for the Society at the time of Ignatius in the following ways. Firstly, it granted them freedom to move beyond diocesan and national boundaries in carrying out their pastoral goals, with little restriction from local bishops or political authorities, since the entire world became their mission area. Secondly, it reinforced their apostolic effectiveness on a wider scale by situating their mission under the authority of the Pope as “universal pastor.” This independence from the dioceses enabled them to embody the universal character of the Society’s mission, strengthening their mobility and adaptability even within a diocese (O’Malley, 1983). Lastly, the fourth vow also highlighted the apostolic dynamism of the Jesuits as apostles of Christ, represented by their fundamental commitment to mission.

3.1.2 The Fourth Vow for Mary Ward’s Institute

Since the primary aims of Mary Ward and her English companions were dedicated to the missionary work for the restoration of the Catholic Church in England, it was impossible to take any of the rules suggested to her with strict enclosure (Wright, 1997). She was convinced that God gave her a vision of a women’s institute to serve freely among people for the Catholic Church, outside the enclosure, no habit, and under a woman’s leadership.

Mary Ward’s recusant background during the English Reformation significantly influenced her vision for an active religious life. Women in England played important roles in the underground Catholic community, working as collaborators of male missionaries. Mary Ward sought to model her Institute closely on the Society of Jesus to achieve its apostolic goals. Her insight to ‘take the same (of the Society)’ (1611) made it clear that what she and her companions were already doing in practice, the missionary works in England, was to be continued and extended as an Institute. This involved her vocation to transcend women’s traditional roles as simple helpers or contemplative nuns and become active agents and missionary sisters.

As her revolutionary vision drew pressure from outside, her initiative gradually matured into the third and final Plan, *Institutum* (1621). Just as in the Society’s *Formula, Institutum*

describes herself and her companions as soldiers of God ‘beneath the banner of the cross,’ and their desire to be ‘designated by the name of Jesus.’ Her determination to ‘take the same of the Society’ was concretized by deriving 85% of the Jesuit *Formula* (1550), including the fourth vow, with only a few alterations. She expanded and modified some parts of the list of ministries to accommodate gender differences and to ensure women’s roles in defending and propagating the Catholic faith.

Mary Ward’s sole purpose was to have women participate more actively in the Catholic mission. Whereas this goal was grounded in her traditional faith convictions, the means she chose were too innovative and controversial at that time. Although she acknowledged the Church’s traditionally prescribed roles for men and women, such as the priesthood, she questioned the dismissive patriarchal assumptions about women’s potential capabilities, rejecting the idea that inferiority was inherent in gender differences (Moss, 1999). She firmly asserted that gender was not relevant to spiritual life, as there is no difference between men and women (Lux-Sterritt, 2010).

Pope Urban VIII approved certain female teaching orders with the requirement of enclosure. But Mary Ward’s Institute was seen as transgressing gender roles imposed on women of her time, and challenging the Church built upon patriarchy with assumptions about women’s inferior and weak nature. It was a threat to a masculinist construction of the Church, in which males had the sole right and power of granting recognition that female orders needed for survival (Vasilescu, 2004). The measure of threat felt by the authorities was exemplified in Urban VIII’s violently worded Bull of Suppression.

We totally and completely suppress and extinguish them, subject them to perpetual abolition and remove them entirely from the Holy Church of God. We destroy and annul them, and we wish and command all the Christian faithful to regard and repute them as suppressed, extinct, rooted out, destroyed and abolished. And we do not wish such women and virgins to be bound or obliged in any way to the observance of the aforementioned vows. (*Pastoralis Romini Pontificis*, 1631)

Although the Bull acknowledged her “good faculties” and the Institute’s progress, it described it as ‘Jesuitesses’ whose “poisonous growths in the church of God” should be “torn up from the roots.” It also criticized their ministries as “most unsuited to their weak sex and character, to female modesty and particularly to maidenly reserve.”

Despite the suppression, the Institute survived. One reason was that the local churches and civil authorities valued its education ministry. (Wright, 1997) For Mary Ward, it was aimed at the propagation of the faith by helping young girls become good Christians. Spread throughout Europe, her Institute educated girls, although it was criticized for modelling the Jesuit curriculum of theatrical performance and public speaking. (Bicks, 2009) As it grew into a larger educational organization, the next generation employed a different strategy for survival and further expansion from Mary Ward’s. At its cost, it forfeited its missionary nature – the essence of Mary Ward’s vision. It gave up on achieving freedom from the jurisdiction of local bishops and women’s agency for the central government, the two inseparable features of the fourth vow. Its members were admonished not to claim Mary Ward as the foundress, or they would be suppressed again. It took more than another century until the Church’s attitude towards women changed. She was restored as the foundress in 1909.

3.1.3 Comparison between the Society and Mary Ward’s Institute

The fourth vow in Mary Ward’s Institute has the same essence as the Society. Through the fourth vow, she had a universal vision for mission, aiming for ‘the greater service of God and the good of souls.’ At the outset, the first Jesuits felt the need for universality because they were from different parts of the world. To the contrary, Mary Ward and her companions were all English and had a different foundational experience from the Society. Yet they wanted the fourth vow with the same content. Not only did the ideal for the universal Church grow in their mind, but they also determined to go to the Turks or any other infidels, or any heretics, schismatics, or any of the faithful. Notably, Mary Ward’s Institute is fundamentally rooted in

Ignatian spirituality and his understanding of mission. Its life must be anchored in love and fidelity to Christ, as reflected in Mary Ward's intention to name the Institute that of 'Jesus.'¹

However, significant differences emerged in reality. The prevailing gender norms, as well as their distinct cultural and historical contexts, led to different histories and practices regarding the fourth vow. From the outset, the Jesuits included the fourth vow in their foundational plan for the Society. This was not the case for Mary Ward. Constrained by the contemporary assumptions about women, her sense of vocation unfolded only gradually. Whereas Ignatius and his priest-companions, with sufficient theological education, had an advantage and favor with Pope Paul III, Mary Ward's relationship with the papacy was marked by greater hierarchy and uncertainty. Her initiative became so controversial that the fourth vow was not much discussed in written documents, or if so, they did not survive. In this context, the Pope's role as "universal pastor" appears less evident in her Institute. Mary Ward's request for sole dependence on the Pope and freedom from local authorities remained unsolved under successive pontificates and was never granted during her lifetime. Indeed, it would take almost four centuries to revive her Plan of the Institute and put the fourth vow into practice.

While Mary Ward adopted the fourth vow from the Ignatian tradition, the historical circumstances of her Institute prevented its full realization. This difference highlights the gendered limitations embedded in the patriarchal structures of her time and invites a renewed theological interpretation of the vow today.

3.2 ELIZABETH A. JOHNSON'S WISDOM CHRISTOLOGY

In contemporary theology, feminist theologians have re-examined the Christian tradition in order to uncover its liberating elements for women, to challenge the elements that have contributed to the oppression of women within the Church. Among them, Elizabeth A. Johnson develops a distinctive Wisdom Christology that challenges patriarchal interpretations while remaining rooted in the Christian tradition. By reimagining Christ through the female biblical figure of Wisdom, Johnson not only critiques the assumptions of classical Christology but also articulates a more inclusive vision of discipleship, justice, and universal salvation. This section examines her reinterpretation of the symbol of Christ through the Wisdom tradition and explores its effect on the discipleship of Jesus and the mission of the Christian community.

¹ In a letter to Nuncio Albergati in 1621, Mary Ward wrote, "Concerning the name, I have twice in several years understood in as particular a manner as these other things I have recounted, that the denomination of these must be Jesus. And thrice, I think more often, of the inconveniences that would happen to both parties if ours should have any dependency on the Fathers of the Society." (Dirmeier, 2007: 540)

3.2.1 Critique of Christology

Feminist theologians, including Johnson, regard traditional Christology as the most serious perpetrator of discrimination against women, especially in its interpretation of Jesus' maleness (Ruether, 1981). His maleness is indeed a historical part of Jesus. However, it becomes problematic if it "is lifted up and made essential for his Christic function and identity," thereby alienating women from the participation in the fullness of Christian identity (Johnson, 1995, p. 119).

Johnson identifies two primary ways classical Christology contributes to systematic sexism. First, sexist Christology uses Jesus' maleness to represent God exclusively in male images. This leads to the assumption of an ontological connection between the historical Jesus' maleness and the divine maleness (Ruether, 1983). However, God, who transcends all human images and concepts unimaginably, created both male and female in God's image. We can image God in all male, female, and even non-personal terms. While the Jewish scriptures present female images of God, Jesus also used female images for God: as a baker woman (Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21) and a woman searching for her lost coin (Lk 15:8-10).

Second, androcentric Christology uses the gender of Jesus to reinforce male superiority, assuming men are more conformed to the image of Christ and closer to the human ideal than women. A belief that Jesus chose the male sex in the Incarnation creates "an ontological necessity rather than a historical option," which implies that only men can fully represent Christ (Johnson, 1990: 107). Since women's femaleness would prevent the direct identification with him, women can only relate to Christ through a male in his Christic role.

3.2.2 Discovering Wisdom Incarnate

As an alternative to sexist Christology, Johnson develops Wisdom Christology. She re-imagines the mystery of Christ through a feminine symbol of "the Wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). Wisdom (*Sophia* in Greek) is one of the images that the early Christians used to name Jesus. This female figure appears as God's presence in the Wisdom literature, ascribed with all the functions of God: "Sophia creates, redeems, establishes justice, protects the poor" (Wells, 1995: 333). She is a giver of life. (Prv 8:35) She existed before the beginning of the world (Prv 8:22-31) and is associated with the creation (Prv 3:19). By her redemptive power, "she renews all things" (Wis 7:27), and human beings are "saved by wisdom" (Wis 9:18). She also teaches human beings, reaching them in the world. As Johnson (1985: 275-276) asserts, "Sophia is reality God herself in her activity in the world, God images as female acting subject...God's active and gracious presence in the world." Acknowledging Sophia's imminence gives

importance to ordinary daily life with its struggles and beauty, as well as God's mighty wonders (Johnson, 1995).

The early Christians transferred and attributed to Jesus the words, functions, and characteristics of Sophia, reflecting their experience of his saving power and love (Johnson, 1985). They signified Jesus' unique relation to God, as more than just a man inspired by God (Johnson, 2005). Paul even explicitly called Jesus, "the Wisdom of God," (1 Cor 1:24) and attributed to him Sophia's creative and cosmological role. (cf. Col 1:15; 1 Cor 8:6)

The symbol of Wisdom exemplifies God's "gracious goodness, life-giving creativity, and passion for justice" (Johnson, 1992, p. 157). One can retell the story of Jesus without glorifying the maleness of Jesus, while appreciating the dignity of women as well. Jesus invites women as well as men to liberating relationships of mutual respect, support, and challenge (Johnson, 1995). The Cross symbolizes the "kenosis of patriarchy," the self-giving of male-dominating power (Ruether, 1983; Johnson, 1995). Johnson articulates it further, "Jesus' maleness is prophecy announcing from within the end of patriarchy, at least as divinely ordained...it becomes clear that the heart of the problem is not that Jesus was a man" (p. 127), but that not too many men follow in his footsteps.

3.2.3 Transforming the Christ Symbol

Jesus Christ, as the embodiment of Sophia, indicates one God, the creator and savior of all male and female, imaged by both together (Johnson, 1985). When interpreted inclusively, one releases Jesus Christ from the exclusive use of male metaphors. As Johnson argues, this insight breaks through the assumption of any necessary link between maleness and God, allowing Jesus – even as a human man – to be understood as revealing the graciousness of God imaged as female (Johnson, 2005).

The transformation of the Christ symbol reshapes not only the relationships between human beings and God, but also among human beings themselves. In Jesus-Sophia, the rigid stereotypes of masculinity and femininity can be overturned, opening to new possibilities of mutuality (Johnson, 1995). Johnson's theology, therefore, shifts the classical view that associated women with matter and flesh toward a perspective that rejects the dichotomy between matter and spirit (p. 132). The historicity of Jesus-Sophia as a bodily being affirms the value of matter; thus, women in their bodies, like men, share in equal dignity. Furthermore, the significance of Sophia incarnate promotes values that are more inclusive of women. By emphasizing themes such as friendship, relationality, compassion, and holistic patterns of

relationship, the interpretation of Jesus becomes less tied to patriarchal assumptions and more closely connected to women's lived experience (p. 131).

This inclusive interpretation renews the community of disciples and fosters reconciliation and mutual empowerment. Every human being, whether male or female, is called to be a friend and a representative of God. Jesus-Sophia invites all human beings to participate equally in the life and mission of Christ, leading them toward a unity that embraces diversity.

3.2.4 Jesus-Sophia and Discipleship for Justice

According to Johnson, all women and men share in the image and likeness of Christ by participating in his life and mission, not by replicating his physical characteristics (Johnson, 1995). As part of the inner circle of disciples, women received the same Spirit at Pentecost and went forth as active coworkers with men – apostles, prophets, preachers, missionaries, healers, and leaders of house churches in the early Church (Johnson, 2019).² Together, women and men participate in the liberating mission of Jesus-Sophia, who was sent to gather all the outcasts under the wings of the gracious God and transform them into new life (Johnson, 1992).

Wisdom Christology carries important practical implications. As Johnson argues, the key particularity of Jesus' mission is the scandal of his option for the poor and marginalized, including women. This points toward the goal of "the creation of a new order of wholeness in justice" (Johnson, 1995, p. 131). The Wisdom tradition provides a foundation for this vision. Proverbs describes the oppression of the poor as an insult to God, while kindness toward them honors God (Prv 14:31). It repeatedly exhorts people to care for widows, orphans, and the poor and instructs rulers to govern with righteousness (p. 132).

This context of Wisdom illuminates the understanding of Jesus' ministry and suffering. In Jesus-Sophia, God's commitment is clearly expressed in the lifting of oppression and the restoration of just relationships (Johnson, 1995). Johnson therefore underlines the mission of the community of the disciples in continuity with Jesus' option for the poor: setting the table, inviting the poor and marginalized, and remaining faithful to this mission even at the cost of his own death. Consequently, his disciples are called to "listen to the cries of Jesus-Sophia resounding in the cries of the poor, violated, and desperate and to ally our lives as the Wisdom community to the divine creative, redeeming the work of establishing right order in the world" (p. 133)

² The last chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans (16:1-16) presents a striking example of how women participated in founding the early Church; Paul greets those outstanding women by name. Women shared the leadership in the early Church in Rome with men.

This Wisdom vision of discipleship provides an important theological framework for reflecting on the mission of the Christian community today. It shapes not only theological discourse about God but also the concrete participation of women and men in the life and mission of the Church.

3.2.5 Practical Effect: The Universality of Jesus-Sophia

In exploring the practical implications of Jesus-Sophia, Johnson highlights the universal character of Wisdom. In the Wisdom tradition, Sophia is not confined to Israel but is portrayed as present and active throughout the entire world. She holds sway over all lands and peoples (Sir 24:6) and, as the kindly spirit of God, fills the world, embracing and holding all things together (Wis 1:6-7). Therefore, Sophia symbolizes God's activity in a nonexclusive way. While the Wisdom figure embodies the compassion and love of God, it also extends beyond these images to engage governing, teaching, justice-making, and giving life throughout the whole world (Johnson, 2007).

Through the lens of Jesus-Sophia, the universality of Jesus' person, life, and ministry becomes abundantly clear. His table fellowship and encounters with sinners, outcasts, and Gentiles reveal his inclusiveness, symbolizing the universal scope of the good news. Moreover, his resurrection inaugurated a new future for all human beings (Johnson, 1990). By the late first century, this conviction became explicit in Christianity, as expressed in the First Letter to Timothy, which proclaims that God "wills everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim 2:4)

An imperialist interpretation of Jesus leads to the conclusion that there is no salvation in other religions outside Christianity. Yet the Second Vatican Council opened a horizon for a more inclusive view by recognizing the possibility of salvation for every human being, even in other religions (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no.22). Johnson develops this inclusive perspective and challenges a patriarchal pattern of thinking that portrays Jesus as "a figure of closedness rather than openness" (Johnson, 2007, p. 176) Instead, the saving significance of Jesus encompasses all humanity, crossing any social boundaries of the world. As Sophia manifests God's love for humanity and makes friends of God throughout the whole world, those outside the Christian community may also encounter God in ways known to God alone (Johnson, 1995). This universality of Sophia makes Wisdom Christology particularly insightful in today's context, as it resonates with contemporary theology, which increasingly acknowledges the value of other religious traditions and dialogue with them.

Sophia, often portrayed as a teacher in the Wisdom tradition, also remains relevant in the world of education. As she actively calls, instructs, and transforms human beings in God's way (cf. Prov 4:13; Wis 8:7-8; Sir 4:11-12), she inspires educators toward a universal vision. Education, therefore, becomes a participation in the educational mission of Jesus-Sophia. Grounded in universality, Jesus-Sophia reveals education as a means of affirming the dignity of every person while nurturing the capacity and responsibility needed in the transformation of the whole community toward inclusivity and mutuality. In this sense, "being sent" for education is not limited to geographical mobility or particular roles; rather, it involves a commitment to fostering inclusive relationships with diverse cultures and realities, both within the educational field and the life of the Congregation itself.

This insight helps in understanding the fourth vow of Mary Ward's Institute, which invites all its members to be fully available for mission and sent anywhere, wherever needs are greatest in the world. As Wisdom Christology moves beyond the reinterpretation of the symbol of Christ in inclusive and relational terms, it calls the whole Christian community to embody the universal dimension of mission. When divine Sophia actively reaches out to all human beings, the community of disciples cannot limit its mission within a particular scope but must extend it toward greater universality. Although not discussed in detail in this study, Johnson further expands it beyond humanity to encompass the cries of creation, emphasizing the cosmic significance of Sophia. In relation to education and missionary formation, this universal dimension underscores the importance of growth not only in intellectual understanding but also in relational awareness. Such formation cultivates the capacity to create space for others and flourish the whole community. In responding to Sophia's call and participating in her universal mission, the community of disciples becomes a sign of Sophia's living presence through practices of openness, justice, compassion, and solidarity with the whole of creation.

3.3 TOWARD A FRESH UNDERSTANDING OF THE FOURTH VOW FOR MISSION

Since the vow of obedience to the Pope, Vicar of Christ, is ultimately directed toward love for Christ, interpretation of Christ is central to understanding and living out the fourth vow. For this reason, the fourth vow must be interpreted not only canonically but also, and more importantly, Christologically. While the previous section examined Elizabeth A. Johnson's Wisdom Christology, this section draws on her insights to reinterpret the fourth vow from this Christological perspective.

Johnson's Christology offers fresh insight into the significance and mission of Jesus while affirming women's full participation in discipleship. In this respect, her work resonates strongly with Mary Ward's pioneering vision of a women's apostolic institute in the seventeenth century. Although Mary Ward herself could not develop an explicit Christology – since women of her time had no access to formal theological education – she expressed her vision through spiritual journals and letters. Johnson's Wisdom Christology can therefore be seen as providing a theological articulation of a conviction that Mary Ward already embodied: the equal discipleship of women and men in the mission of Christ.

3.3.1 The Fourth Vow

Elizabeth A. Johnson notes that oppressed women sometimes concentrate on survival rather than liberation in order to safeguard their lives and their children's (Johnson, 2007).³ Likewise, for a long time, the Congregation focused on survival, with only a partial link to Mary Ward's charism. It had to forfeit her initial plan and compromise to a monastic character, unable to claim her as our founder and use the name of Jesus to call the Congregation.

The official recognition of Mary Ward as the founder of the Congregation in 1909 marked liberation from patriarchal oppression. It was the fruit of its long perseverance and faithfulness to Christ, in belief that its members were called to participate in his mission alongside men. Following the development of inclusive theology and the Church's attitude toward women, the Congregation has freely reclaimed Mary Ward's heritage and restored its original foundational charism, including the fourth vow.

In light of Johnson's Christology, recognizing the importance of the fourth vow affirms women's equal participation with men in Christ's mission and reclaims the vocation of missionary discipleship for members of the Congregation. Emerging from its long struggle for identity, the fourth vow thus becomes an expression of both the Congregation's identity and its mission for the universal good. It also signifies a commitment to liberation and empowerment of those oppressed and marginalized, as well as a hope for the transformation of the entire Christian community.

³ Johnson refers to the work of Delores Williams on Hagar's story (1993) in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*.

3.3.2 Obedience to the Pope

Excluded from the Christic role, women have long been muted and marginalized in the life of the Church and, in many parts of the world, continue to be regarded as inferior and secondary. The concrete experiences of Mary Ward and the Congregation clearly reveal how an androcentric mentality restricted women-religious in their participation in the Church's mission. As a result, women-religious have historically had fewer opportunities than men to engage in a close and reciprocal relationship with the Pope. Intertwined with women's lived experience of patriarchal culture, this history has often shaped their perception of the Pope – whether consciously or unconsciously – as a distant head of the Church rather than the intimate vicar of Christ.

By contrast, Johnson challenges these androcentric assumptions and develops an inclusive Christology, which destabilizes the patriarchal interpretations of the symbol of Christ. By rediscovering Jesus-Sophia, she transforms the symbol of Christ toward transcending exclusively male metaphors and male superiority. In this vision, women are not passive recipients but active subjects who can participate fully in the identity and life of Christ. Accordingly, women can also move toward a relationship of mutuality and friendship, as men do, with the Vicar of Christ, the pastor of “the community of discipleship” in its mission in the world.

From this perspective, ‘obedience to the Pope’ may be interpreted anew through the inclusive symbol of Jesus-Sophia. This is a significant step away from the androcentric gender paradigm that has often alienated women from the symbol of Christ. By drawing upon the female figure of personified Wisdom, ‘Vicar of Christ’ can be reimagined beyond male-dominated imagery. Therefore, women's relationship with the Vicar of Christ can be direct and personal since women are subjects equal to men rather than secondary or inferior in the Christian community. In this renewed interpretation, obedience to the Pope deepens our ecclesial unity while enriching the life of the Church with greater reciprocity and diversity.

When women can relate to the Pope not only as the supreme hierarch of the Church but also as its “universal pastor,” such a relationship highlights communion and mutuality rather than a purely hierarchical structure. Within this framework, the original purpose of the fourth vow becomes clearer – it is pastoral and practical. It orients the Congregation toward openness in mission. In this sense, obedience to the “Vicar of Christ on earth” empowers the sisters to be sent with greater freedom and confidence, rooted in a relationship of faithfulness and trust with the Church while repudiating the longstanding presumption of women's inferiority.

3.3.3 Mission

During the Reformation period, Catholics and Protestants resisted, fought, and even decimated each other, not to mention pagans and non-Europeans. For Mary Ward, mission fundamentally meant ‘the defense and propagation of the faith,’ that is, evangelization for the conversion of people to the Catholic faith, especially within the context of the English Reformation. It also included sharing the Christian faith with unbelievers in distant countries, such as the Turks and the Indies. Since the seventeenth century, however, the Church’s understanding of mission has developed significantly. Through the waves of renewal, the Church has shifted to a more inclusive and integrative framework in theology and mission, moving away from dualistic thinking. Accordingly, mission is now defined as “a single but complex and articulated reality,” encompassing various dimensions such as living witness, promotion of justice, and inter-religious dialogue as well as proclamation of the Gospel.

Johnson’s Christology is grounded in this renewed understanding of mission. She emphasizes in her early Christology that the mission of the Christian community is constitutive of justice and peace for all humanity.⁴ Rather than remaining exclusive and confined to itself, the Church is called to open its doors, reach out to the peripheries of society, listen to the cries of the world, and engage in dialogue with other cultures and religions. In Wisdom Christology, Johnson applies the practical effect of Jesus-Sophia on the mission of the Church, within three areas of concern: justice, inter-religious dialogue, and ecology. (Although Johnson discusses inter-religious dialogue specifically as one area, this study extends it to ‘culture’ with respect to universality, since culture generally involves religion and other distinctive characteristics of human society.)

Through the lens of Johnson’s theology, mission may be understood in terms of the universality of Jesus-Sophia revealed in all his life, death, and resurrection. As Jesus-Sophia widens the horizon of God’s people from Israel to all the nations, and from Jewish people to all human beings, this universality entails both geographical and ontological dimensions. It embraces all human social identities, including race, gender, sexuality, religion, class, and generation, and also the entire community of creation. The mission of the community of disciples is then oriented to what Johnson describes as “the creation of a new order of wholeness” in the world (Johnson, 1995, p. 131).

⁴ In *Consider Jesus*, Elizabeth A. Johnson (1990) articulates that promoting social justice is essential in our mission in Chapter 5, *Jesus Christ and Justice*.

This wholeness can be realized when no particular group dominates or controls the entire community, but when each group and individual participates equally, building relationships together that foster a culture of unified diversity. Furthermore, as Johnson articulates the ecological dimension of universality, the salvific significance of Jesus-Sophia permeates humanity and also the whole of creation. This perspective deepens the Church's ecological awareness within mission. The Church may envision, in this broader horizon, the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed and enacted in himself, seeking the fullness and harmony of the whole of humanity and creation.

Johnson notes that the aim of her Christology is not only to offer theological insight but also to contribute to the transformation of the community. In order to do this, each individual is called to personal transformation, becoming an active participant in mission. As Sophia in the Wisdom tradition affirms the significance of daily life and the ordinary activities that shape one's being, such ordinary realities acquire deeper meaning in Jesus-Sophia. Mission thus involves more than performing ministries. It entails "being" and living in the spirit of Sophia, as committed to justice and peace and in relationships with others in the community. In an increasingly interconnected world in which diverse cultures interact more than before, this commitment can be expressed concretely through interculturality. By welcoming different cultures and social identities as gifts rather than obstacles, intercultural living becomes a way of realizing the universality of Jesus and manifesting the life-giving presence of Jesus-Sophia.

Overall, the metaphor of Jesus-Sophia enables the Congregation of Jesus to move beyond patriarchal interpretation of the fourth vow for mission. Viewed from this inclusive Christological perspective, the vow of obedience to the Pope is no longer restricted to men; rather, it calls for full participation in the Church's mission for both women and men. As Johnson's Christology also underlines the intrinsic connection between theology and practice, the fourth vow requires attention to the practical aspects of Wisdom's presence and activity in the world, thereby making universality an essential dimension of mission.

In light of this deeper understanding of mission, the meaning of "being sent" under the fourth vow extends beyond physical mobility today. It applies not only geographically but also ontologically and relationally, particularly in areas such as education. The fourth vow calls for a greater universality, enabling the disciples of Jesus-Sophia to witness through their lives to right and just relationships with God, with others, with themselves, and with all creation. Such an understanding highlights the importance of an inner disposition of openness and mutuality when "being sent." As an expression of one's response to the call of missionary discipleship,

the fourth vow holds significance for all members of the Congregation. Whether geographically mobile or not, they participate fully in Jesus' mission in their way of being, wherever they are sent or situated.

4. CONCLUSION

The Christological interpretation of the fourth vow through the lens of Jesus-Sophia invites us to participate more fully in Jesus' mission by embracing otherness and becoming more universal. This does not depart from the original intention of Mary Ward or Ignatius but unfolds its relevance in the contemporary context. Their desire to be sent anywhere for mission can be understood today as greater universality, not only in geographical availability but also in ontological and relational openness. Thus, the fourth vow of obedience to the Pope continues to express the missionary identity of the Congregation of Jesus, as envisioned by Mary Ward, yet in a renewed way. It signifies a deeper commitment to embody justice, inclusivity, and unity in diversity in everyday life. When interpreted through the universality of Jesus-Sophia, the special vow of obedience to the Pope calls for witnessing to God's loving, all-embracing, and transformative presence and activity in the world. It remains a prophetic vocation for the companions of Jesus, both women and men, in creating a more just, reconciling, and flourishing community for all.

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