

“This is a Profound Mystery”: Union and Distinction between Christ and His Church in Johann Adam Möhler and His Twentieth-Century Successors

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MODERN ROMAN CATHOLIC ecclesiology is indebted to the work of Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838). His creative synthesis of diverse historical, philosophical, and ecclesial influences refreshed post-Enlightenment Catholicism with a view of the Church defined less by abstract, Scholastic assertions and more by the living, historical reality of the community of faith. Yet Möhler by no means resolved all the questions he raised by taking this tack. This essay focuses on one such question that has been especially fecund for Möhler’s successors: how are the union and the distinction between Christ and his Church to be understood?

The apostle Paul set the terms of this question most provocatively in his letter to the Ephesians. After citing the Genesis passage concerning Adam and Eve’s nuptial union—“the two shall become one flesh”—the apostle goes on to comment: “This is a profound mystery, but I am speaking of Christ and his Church” (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:32). Aside from whatever Paul meant by this exactly, Möhler

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at least came to interpret this one-flesh union between Christ and Church as being somehow realized through the Incarnation itself, as will be shown.¹ By the end of his career, however, Möhler had not clarified sufficiently how, despite its union with Christ, the pilgrim Church on earth could still be seen as ontologically distinct from him. But, as I will explain, some of Möhler's twentieth-century successors turned to Mariology to remedy this point of confusion, hoping to retain the Tübingen theologian's organic view of the Church as a living *communio* united by the Spirit while illuminating the "profound mystery" in which Christ and Church become one (though remaining distinct) in the dialogical freedom of what Scripture pictures in terms of spousal love.

After describing Möhler's place within modern Catholic ecclesiology, I will recount the historiography concerning "Möhler's shift," his shift from a "pneumatocentric" account of the Church's divine-human communion to a more "incarnational" account. For some scholars, Möhler bequeathed a bifurcated ecclesiology that remains unsettled, according to which the visible Church on earth is fundamentally constituted *either* by its receptivity to the Holy Spirit *or* by its ongoing exercise of the visible authority given directly by Christ incarnate. In a third section, I will query this either-or by assessing the contributions of a trio of Möhler's successors who sought to deal with this particular problem. For Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph

¹ I do not mean to suggest that Möhler focused his ecclesiology on this particular Pauline concept. But he does refer to it in a crucial section of *Symbolik*, which corroborates my presentation here. After emphasizing the Word's desire to come to humanity not merely in an inward manner, but outwardly, in the flesh, and thus to establish a permanent, visible community, Möhler writes: "The administration of the sacraments, as well as the preaching of the word, was entrusted by the Lord to the apostolic college and to those commissioned by it; so that all believers, by means of this apostolic college are linked to the community, and in a living manner connected with it. The fellowship with Christ is accordingly the fellowship with his community—the internal union with him a communion with his Church. Both are inseparable, and Christ is in the Church, and the Church in him (Eph. v, 29–33)" (Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism, or Presentation of the Dogmatic Differences of Catholics and Protestants*, §37, trans. James Burton Robertson [New York: Crossroad Herder, 1997], 261; originally *Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften*, ed. Josef Rupert Geiselmann [Köln: Jakob Hegner, 1958], 392; all citations of German from *Symbolik* will come from Geiselmann's critical edition; unless otherwise noted, all English translation comes from Robertson's edition).

Ratzinger, and Henri de Lubac, a deeper consideration of Mary overcomes the apparent dualism between a "pneumatological model" of the Church and an "incarnational model." More specifically, by attending further to Mary's role in the mystery of the Incarnation, Balthasar, Ratzinger, and de Lubac resituate the visible authority of the Church within a deeper *communio* ecclesiology, but in a way that does not diminish the sacramental character of the hierarchical ministry.

Möhler's Place in Modern Catholic Ecclesiology

Möhler is widely acknowledged as the most significant theologian to have been associated with the so-called "Catholic Tübingen School," which he is also credited for cofounding, along with his teacher, Johann Sebastian Drey.² This "school" took its bearings when the faculty of Ellwangen seminary joined the University of Tübingen in 1817. From here, the faculty became more active in the German Catholic renewal following the culture shock of the French Revolution and the intellectual challenges of the German Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*).³ The philosophical resources supplied by romanticism were amenable in some ways to Catholic attempts to modernize, but Drey and Möhler (who went from student to teacher in 1823) were adaptable, drawing as much from the early Church Fathers, historical theology, and the *katholische Aufklärung* as from Lessing, Schelling, or Schleiermacher, and their notable colleagues Johannes Kuhn and Johann Baptist Hirscher were likewise adaptable.⁴ Michel Deneken's recent biography notes this interdisciplinary theological dialogue: "What moved Möhler and his friends at Tübingen was their love of the Church and Christ. Their

² The question of whether the first generation of Catholic scholars at Tübingen constituted a "school" is a subject of debate. See Rudolf Reinhardt, "Die Katholische-Theologische Fakultät Tübingen im ersten Jahrhundert ihres Bestehens: Faktoren und Phasen der Entwicklung," in *Tübinger Theologen und ihre Theologie: Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät Tübingen*, ed. Rudolf Reinhardt (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), 1–42. See also Bradford Hinze, "Roman Catholic Theology: Tübingen," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 187–213.

³ Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996 [originally 1977]), 30–31. See also Grant Kaplan, *Answering the Enlightenment: The Catholic Recovery of Historical Revelation* (New York: Crossroad, 2006).

⁴ Hinze, "Roman Catholic Theology: Tübingen," 191.

research was stimulated by their adoration of a Catholicism in so much need of renewal.”⁵

On this score, Möhler’s most enduring point of influence has been his contribution to modern ecclesiology.⁶ Two years after joining Tübingen’s faculty, his exercises in patrology, his engagement with Schleiermacher, and his tutelage in the thought of Johann Michael Sailer⁷ led to his groundbreaking 1825 *Die Einheit in der Kirche* (*Unity in the Church*),⁸ which opened up a new atmosphere of thought concerning the nature of the Church, one quite different from the regnant accounts derived from the counter-Reformation. In the latter context, polemical debates with Protestants led the Catholic Church to draw stringent lines around its social identity, lines such as those embedded in Robert Bellarmine’s influential definition: “The Church is the assembly of believers that is held together by their profession of the same Christian faith and by the fellowship of the same sacraments and is placed under the care of their legitimate shepherds, especially the one Vicar of Christ on earth, the Bishop of Rome.”⁹ Over and against this more bounded “sociological” definition, Möhler’s *Einheit* revived a deeper vision of the Church’s spiritual

⁵ “Ce qui a mû Möhler et ses amis au sein de l’école de Tübingen était leur amour de l’Église et du Christ. Leur recherche a été aiguillonnée par leur vénération pour un catholicisme qui avait tellement besoin de renouveau” (Michel Deneken, *Johann Adam Möhler* [Paris: Cerf, 2007], 47; my translation).

⁶ “The great glory of Möhler shall always be his sublime conception of the Church in its internal and external structure. Few men have loved the Church as passionately and lovingly as he, and it was this deep and abiding love of the Church which drove him on to seek the depths of her mystery” (Peter Riga, “The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler,” *Theological Studies* 22 [1961]: 563–87).

⁷ Deneken, *Johann Adam Möhler*, 58.

⁸ *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte*, ed. Josef Rupert Geiselmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1957); English translation: *Unity in the Church or the Principles of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, ed. and trans. Peter C. Erb (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996). Unless otherwise noted, all English translation of *Einheit* will be from Erb’s edition.

⁹ Robert Bellarmine, “On the Councils and the Church” 3.2, in *Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei adversus hujus temporis haereticos*, 3 vols. (Ingolstadt: Sartorius, 1586–1593); English translation in Joseph Ratzinger, “The Nature and Limits of the Church,” in *Fundamental Speeches: From Five Decades*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Michael J. Miller, J. R. Foster, and Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012 [Original German, 2005]), 111–32, at 114.

communion that, in the twentieth century, became “the departure point for the ecclesiological renovation that would end with the Second Vatican Council.”¹⁰

Of course, Möhler’s place in modern ecclesiology must not be reduced to the impact of just this one work. His 1832 *Symbolik* was far more influential in its immediate setting than was *Einheit* and remained so until the middle of the twentieth century.¹¹ *Symbolik* is unique in the way it joins rank with a distinctly Protestant, and specifically Lutheran, genre of theology according to which the differences between Christian confessions were systematically presented for the sake of doctrinal comparisons.¹² Despite claiming an irenic intent, it was also a provocation that led to a notable public dialogue in print between Möhler and Ferdinand Christian Baur.¹³

More importantly here, *Symbolik*’s constructive conclusions about the divine institution of Catholic ecclesial structures remained influential for Catholic ecclesiology in the years after his death in 1838,¹⁴ until roughly the time Yves Congar edited a new translation of *Einheit* a hundred years later.¹⁵ In *Symbolik*, the inward vitality of the Church described in *Einheit* is shown to be cultivated by a loving adherence to the outward forms of Tradition, Scripture, doctrine, and liturgy, all of which are “sealed and safeguarded by the hierarchy.”¹⁶ For a Church already struggling to navigate the forces of

¹⁰ Louis Bouyer, “The Ecclesiology of Moehler,” in *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982 [original French, 1970]), 91–105, at 93.

¹¹ Michael Himes, “Introduction to the 1997 Edition,” in Robertson (trans.), *Symbolism*, xi.

¹² Grant Kaplan, “What Has Prussia to Do with Tübingen? The Political-Ecclesial Context of Möhler’s *Symbolik*,” *Pro Ecclesia* 27 (2018): 81–112.

¹³ See Ferdinand C. Baur, *Der Gegensatz des Katholizismus und Protestantismus nach den Prinzipien und Hauptdogmen der beiden Lehrbegriffe* (Tübingen: Dues, 1834), to which Möhler replied with his *Neue Untersuchung der Lehrgegensätze zwischen den Katholiken und Protestanten* (Mainz: Kupferberg, 1834).

¹⁴ Möhler moved to the University of Munich in 1835 for a position in New Testament exegesis, developing a rather unlikely friendship with Ignaz von Döllinger. The next year, he contracted cholera, eventually suffering a pulmonary infection from which he never recovered, dying in 1838 at the age of thirty-nine (Deneken, *Johann Adam Möhler*, 38–42).

¹⁵ Johann Adam Möhler, *L’Unité dans l’Église, ou le principe du catholicisme: d’après l’esprit des pères des trois premiers siècles de l’Église*, trans. Pierre Chaillet (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

¹⁶ James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 193.

modernity, such emphases were better received than the romanticism of *Einheit*. Hence, from the latter half of the nineteenth century into the start of the twentieth, Möhler was incorporated into the general tenor of an ascending neo-scholasticism and the specific influence of the Roman School, led by Giovanni Perrone, that eventuated in the declarations of the First Vatican Council in 1870.¹⁷

Interpreting “Möhler’s Shift”

As already indicated, a notable transition took place between the ecclesiology supplied in the 1825 *Einheit* and that of the later *Symbolik*, the details of which have been carefully documented by Michael Himes.¹⁸ The overall substance of this move, from a pneumatocentric to a Christocentric ecclesiology, has been a source of ongoing debate about Möhler’s formative influence on modern Catholic ecclesial identity. Thus, in this section, I will review the crux of the difficulty, first as it emerges from within Möhler’s own writing, relying largely on Himes’s outline, and then by exploring its interpretation by Protestants and Catholics alike.

In *Einheit*, the concept of the Church as a living communion of believers has priority, such that the visible structure of the Church and its hierarchical ministry is interpreted as a logical consequence following from the community’s more original sphere of spiritual experience.¹⁹ The institutional Church comes after the fact: the invisible spirit of the community (*Gemeingeist*) precedes its external, visible manifestation and brings the latter to being. Möhler thus speaks of how the visible structure of the Church “formed itself.”²⁰ He does not deny that Christ anticipated his followers would adopt this particular form of community (i.e., the Roman Catholic Church), yet the

¹⁷ See Michael J. Himes, “The Development of Ecclesiology: Modernity to the Twentieth Century,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 45–67. See also C. Michael Shea, “*Ressourcement* in the Age of Migne: The Jesuit Theologians of the *Collegio Romano* and the Shape of Modern Catholic Thought,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 15, no. 2 (2017): 579–613.

¹⁸ Michael J. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

¹⁹ See Möhler, *Unity*, §50: “Without a determined, ordered, and continual teaching office one could not in any way think of a continuing tradition, which . . . is fully necessary to demonstrate the identity of the higher consciousness of the Church throughout all moments of its existence” (Erb, 214).

²⁰ Möhler, *Unity*, §50 (Erb, 214).

ecclesia's visible, structural constitution is explained as "the external production of an inner forming power, *as the body of a spirit creating itself* [als der Körper eines sich selber schaffenden Geistes]." ²¹

Such lines reveal the influence of Schleiermacher, ²² but as Himes points out, in the course of further engagement with the Protestant thinker, Möhler came to perceive a danger embedded in thinking of the visible Church as the outward manifestation of a communal spirit. Specifically, it became impossible for Möhler to articulate theologically how the community's shared experience of its own communion—its *Gemeingeist*, the "one spirit" of Ephesians 4:4—could be seen in proper distinction from the divine hypostasis of the Holy Spirit, who also fills the Church. ²³ That is, Church and Spirit were so united that no analogical difference remained between them. Consequently, starting with his book on Athanasius (1827) ²⁴ and up through *Symbolik*, Möhler demonstrates a marked concern to curb the unintended implication in *Einheit* that the pilgrim Church on earth is, in effect, something like an incarnation of the Holy Spirit. ²⁵

His attempts to clarify how this is not the case are most evident in sections 36–38 of *Symbolik* when he comes to discuss "differences in respect to the doctrine on the church." Here, the "body" of the Church is no longer the necessary outworking of a self-creating spirit, but rather a consequence of Christ's earthly ministry and the

²¹ Möhler, *Einheit*, §49: ". . . als äussere Produktion einer inner bildenden Kraft, als der Körper eines sich selber schaffenden Geistes" (Geiselman, 170).

²² Dennis Doyle sees the overlaps between Möhler and Schleiermacher as so significant that the latter's *The Christian Faith* "might conceivably have been given the same title as Möhler's book: *Unity in the Church*" ("Möhler, Schleiermacher, and the Roots of Communion Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 57 [1996]: 467–80, at 471).

²³ See Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 120: "Möhler has distinguished between the Holy Spirit and the Christian communal spirit on the basis of his panentheist *Weltanschauung*, but *in practice* they become indistinguishable. He has stated the difference between himself and Schleiermacher, but in the elaboration of his ecclesiology that difference tends toward the vanishing point. Once again, the *Gemeingeist* is the only Holy Spirit *that matters*."

²⁴ Johann Adam Möhler, *Athanasius der Grosse und die Kirche seiner Zeit besonders im Kampfe mit dem Arianismus*, 2 vols. (Mainz: Florian Kupferberg, 1827).

²⁵ Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 189–90. See also Michael Himes, "Divinizing the Church," in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, ed. Donald Dietrich and Michael Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 95–110, at 103: "[Möhler] became acutely sensitive to the danger implicit in his formulations in *Einheit in der Kirche* of interpreting the church as a hypostatic union of the Spirit and the community."

first followers' receptivity to the Word of Christ in the Spirit.²⁶ As concerns the nature of the hierarchy, for example, Möhler writes: "Since Christ wanted to be the sufficient authority for all ages, *he created something similar to it* [schuf er durch dieselbe etwas ihr Gleichartiges], and thus something witnessing to and representing the same, eternally destined to bring his authority before all generations."²⁷

Himes recalls that section 37 was added to *Symbolik* precisely to erase all ambiguity that may have remained from *Einheit*. Möhler makes plain that the Christian community does not get to "fashion Christ in its own image," for were this the case, Möhler would be subject to the same criticism he had finally leveled against Schleiermacher.²⁸ But, in taking this new tack of intentionally seeking to connect the body of the Church with the incarnate Christ's ministry, Möhler now struggles to explicate how the Church's authority on earth can be *representative* of Christ, since the hierarchical Church is his own creation that he willed to represent him, but not *identical* with the divine hypostasis of the Son who was made flesh. The most crucial passage in this regard is well known:

Thus, the visible Church, from the point of view here taken, is the Son of God himself, everlastingly manifesting himself among men in a human form, perpetually renovated, and eternally young—the permanent incarnation of the same, as in Holy Writ, even the faithful are called the "body of Christ."²⁹

As these words demonstrate, the ecclesial body carries a univocal referent to the body of the incarnate Word. Such formulae supplied easy fodder for the ascending sense of authority possessed by the

²⁶ See Möhler, *Symbolik*, §36 (Geiselman, 389–90).

²⁷ Möhler, *Symbolik*, §37.2: "Indem Christus die zureichende Autorität für alle Zeiten sein wollte, *schuf er durch dieselbe etwas ihr Gleichartiges*, eben darum sie *Bezeugendes* und *Darstellendes*, das ewig die seinige den Geschlechtern der Menschen nahezubringen die Bestimmung hat" (Geiselman, 398; my emphasis; English translation here is my clarifications of Robertson's).

²⁸ Himes, "Divinizing the Church," 101.

²⁹ Möhler, *Symbolik*, §36: "So ist denn die sichtbare Kirche, von dem eben entwickelten Gesichtspunkte aus, der unter den Menschen in menschlicher Form fortwährend erscheinende, stets sich erneuernde, ewig sich verjüngende Sohn Gottes, die andauernde Fleischwerdung desselben, so wie denn auch die Gläubigen in der heiligen Schrift der Leib Christi genannt werden" (Geiselman, 389; Robertson, 333).

Magisterium in the context of Vatican I and have inspired a host of further interpretive discussions, both within and without the Catholic communion.

Protestant readings of Möhler have criticized his exaltation of a human institutional structure into an authoritative role perceptibly indistinct from Christ incarnate without proper scriptural or theological justification. Again following Himes's lead, I consider the representative insights supplied by David Strauss and Karl Barth.³⁰ According to Barth:

The real importance of Möhler's thinking did not consist in his identifying of what ultimately became the complex of Scripture and tradition with revelation, with the incarnation of the Word, with Jesus Christ, but in his attempting to understand the whole divine dignity and authority ascribed to this complex only as a predicate of the Church, the present-day Church, as the living bearer of the apostolate, the representative of Jesus Christ.³¹

Himes complains that Barth does not adequately contextualize his reading of Möhler, since he cites from *Einheit* and *Symbolik* indiscriminately.³² It is not clear why this ultimately matters, since Barth's problem rests with Möhler's failure to preserve the analogical distance between divinity and humanity as concerns the Church, with his taking for granted that the Christian community on earth simply *is* the visible manifestation of redemptive divinity. Whether such divinity is that of the Son or the Spirit would be of secondary importance.

As we have seen, in *Einheit*, the (visible) body of the Church comes logically after its (invisible) spiritual communion, whereas in *Symbolik*, the (visible) body of the Church comes after its (invisible) reception of Christ's Word. Despite Möhler's concern to connect the Catholic Church's visible communion directly to the Incarnation, the Church's "flesh and blood" logically comes after Christ's own Incarnation, a position that obviously raised some eyebrows on the part of

³⁰ See Himes, "Divinizing the Church."

³¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/2, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978 [originally 1938]), 564–65. Hereafter, this work will be cited simply as "CD."

³² Himes, "Divinizing the Church," 96.

his Protestant interlocutors: how can Möhler both allow for this gap between Christ and Church and then go on to say that the visible, Roman Catholic Church *is* the permanent manifestation of Christ?

From the perspective of this essay, Barth's critique is perspicacious. Möhler failed to perceive a distinction, or at least he failed to articulate the grounds of that distinction, between the "present-day Church, as the living bearer of the apostolate," and the whole "complex" of Christ's revelation. Consequently, in the way he identified them, Möhler was unable to articulate precisely how the hierarchically constituted Roman Catholic Church is not hypostatically united to the divine Word in the same way as was the humanity of Jesus. Anachronistically perhaps, it could be said that Möhler supplies no logic by which to distinguish the visible Church, as the sacramental sign (*sacramentum*) of Christ's presence in the world, from its *res*, as *Lumen Gentium* would later do, for example.³³ To the contrary, making the Christological definition of Chalcedon the ground of a generalized ecclesiology preserves the terms of representation exactly.³⁴ Thus, the same problem he faced in *Einheit* persists, but instead of the Holy Spirit being confused with the community's *Gemeingeist*, the divinity of Christ is perceptually indistinguishable from the visible Church. And, in this schema, that which is "most divine" in the visible Church is the hierarchical structure of ministry, the apostolic succession.³⁵

³³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, §1: "The Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men" (*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, trans. Joseph Gallagher [New York: Guild Press, 1966], 15).

³⁴ Möhler, *Symbolik*, §36: "Wie in Christo Göttliches und Menschliches wohl zu unterscheiden, aber doch auch beides zur Einheit verbunden ist, so wird er auch in ungeteilter Ganzheit in der Kirche fortgesetzt. Die Kirche, seine bleibende Erscheinung, ist göttlich und menschlich zugleich, sie ist die Einheit von beidem [As in Christ, the divinity and the humanity are to be clearly distinguished, though both are bound in unity; so is he in undivided entirety perpetuated in the Church. The Church, his permanent manifestation, is at once divine and human—she is the union of both]" (Geiselmann, 389; Robertson, 333). See also Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 260.

³⁵ Möhler, *Symbolik*, §43: "Der Episkopat [die Fortsetzung des Apostolates] wird hiernach als seine göttliche Institution verehrt; desgleichen nun auch, und eben deshalb, der Einheitspunkt und das Haupt des Episkopates, der Papst [The episcopacy, the continuation of the apostleship, is accordingly revered as a Divine institution: not less so, and even, on that very account, the Pope, who is the centre of unity, and the head of the episcopacy]" (Geiselmann, 451; Robertson, 377).

Along this line, David F. Strauss made the more strident critique of Möhler's path of reasoning: "Möhler could derive the sole-redemptive Popish Church with no greater difficulty from the Christian consciousness than Schleiermacher could His Redeemer. He could give the Christian consciousness a form, in which it seemed interchangeable with the modern principle of progress."³⁶ In other words, if Schleiermacher was guilty of asserting an identity between his Christ of faith and the historical Jesus, Möhler made the same move by asserting an identity between his infallible, idealist church, permanently united with Christ, and the visible structure of authority, headed by Rome.

Barth had no patience with Strauss on this score, but this has more to do with Barth's intention to kill two birds with one stone. By considering Möhler a genuinely "Catholic improvement" on Schleiermacher, Barth was attacking both German liberal Protestantism's "idealistic interpretation of Christian history" and Roman Catholicism's inflated sense of itself.³⁷ For Barth, the former was a derivation of the latter.³⁸

Strauss's observation nevertheless cuts to the heart of the matter. Apart from a deeper consideration of the "one-flesh" union shared by the incarnate Christ and his Church, Möhler's formulations in *Symbolik* tend toward an actual identification between the visible Church constituted by believers and the divinity of Christ himself, such that any perceptual distinction between them is erased:

In the same way as the living foundation of this unity is divine, so shall it be attended with divine effects: by this unity the world shall recognise the heavenly mission of Christ. The

³⁶ David F. Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 12 vols. (Bonn: Emil Strauss, 1876–1877), 2:222 (English translation by Thomson and Knight in Barth, *CD* I/2, 563).

³⁷ Barth, *CD* I/2, 563: "It was really a waste of time for Protestant critics of Möhler's system to accuse him of 'Schleiermacherising' and to charge him with transmuting Catholic doctrine. Möhler himself had already given the answer: Why should we not speak rather of a catholicizing of Schleiermacher?"

³⁸ Barth, *CD* I/2, 563: "The Catholic and the idealistic interpretation of Christian history both do go back to the same conception. They are at one in what ultimately emerges and is expressed in Möhler: in the identity of the Church and its faith and its Word with the revelation which is its basis. The only point is that the Catholic is the original and proper form of this understanding, and the idealistic a derivative form, which (in a preliminary self-misunderstanding) at first contradicted the former. Aware of its identity with Christ, the Catholic Church can in the last resort, if at all, only be interpreted idealistically."

unity must be a visible unity—obvious to the eyes, perceptible by the identity of doctrine, by the real mutual relations and communion of all the followers of Christ with each other; for otherwise the consequences adverted to could not be deduced from it.³⁹

Statements such as these go some way to justifying Himes's conclusion that the threat of Monophysitism looms large if the Chalcedonian definition is applied to the Church without further qualification.⁴⁰

Hence, the substance of Strauss's critique is the following. *As if by fiat*, Möhler "gave form" to Christian consciousness by collapsing the Catholic principle of Tradition into the institutional teaching office of the earthly body of Christ, giving it license for autonomous, self-possessing "progress."⁴¹ As we will see, at least some of Möhler's successors were keen to ask whether perhaps another "form" of Christian consciousness had already been given in the person of Mary, such that the archetypal "form" of the Church vis-à-vis Christ is inherently *dialogical* in terms of both spirit and body, that which is invisible and that which is visible, despite the certainty of *union* between this Church and its Savior.

To summarize thus far: in *Einheit*, we are given a romantic ecclesiology of spiritual communion in which the ideal must necessarily become reality; in *Symbolik* we are instructed that the Incarnation ultimately justifies this reality. But, at just this point, Möhler's ecclesiology remains confused about, on the one hand, how the human members, while in union with Christ's body, are not thereby absorbed by the divinity of the Son and, on the other hand, how the Word of Christ found its way into humanity in the first place in order for the believing Church subsequently to "take shape" after the fact and, through the episcopate, "put on flesh and blood" of its own.⁴² It is worth citing Himes's summation of the issue:

³⁹ Möhler, *Symbolism*, §37.3 (Robertson, 345).

⁴⁰ Himes, "Divinizing the Church," 105: "Making that formula the foundation of ecclesiology will tend, however much one tries to preserve the integrity of both the divine and human elements in the church, to eclipse the latter."

⁴¹ See again Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2:222.

⁴² Möhler, *Symbolik*, §36: "Indem das von Christus gesprochene Wort (dieses in seiner weitesten Bedeutung genommen) mit seinem Geiste in einen Kreis von Menschen einging und von demselben aufgenommen wurde, *hat es Gestalt, hat es Fleisch und Blut angenommen*, und diese Gestalt ist eben die Kirche, welche somit als die wesentliche Form der christlichen Religion selbst von den Katholiken betrachtet wird [Since the Word spoken by Christ

In *Symbolik* Möhler employed the incarnation as the framework in which to understand the church so that he could affirm both the integrity and the interaction of the divine and the human. But he clearly did not wish to claim the church as an instance of hypostatic union. Indeed, he became acutely sensitive to the danger implicit in his formulations in *Einheit in der Kirche* of interpreting the church as a hypostatic union of the Spirit and the community. But how the church can be a fit instrument for the continuance of Christ's work, i.e., a society which reflects the proper God-man relation, without itself being the relationship established in Christ, i.e., hypostatic union, remains unresolved in Möhler's work.⁴³

For Himes, the unresolved tension pervading Möhler's work (again, the tension between a more pneumatological, communal, "bottom-up" view of the Church, à la *Einheit*, and a more incarnational, hierarchical, "top-down" account, as in *Symbolism*) goes a long way toward explaining the Tübingen theologian's longstanding influence on subsequent discussions of the Church within Catholicism.⁴⁴ Quite apart from the question of whether Möhler himself can be read synthetically, the divergences between *Einheit* and *Symbolik* are often taken as a historical-theological point of departure from which two distinct views of the Catholic Church are said to have developed alongside one another without ever really converging, even despite the attempts made at Vatican II to restore a proper balance.

As a case in point, Bradford Hinze defaults to a two-track reading of just this sort in service of his own project of "releasing the power of the Spirit in a Trinitarian ecclesiology."⁴⁵ Thus, as Hinze reads

(taken in its widest significance), with his Spirit, entered into a circle of men and was absorbed by it, it has taken on flesh and blood, and this form is itself the Church, which is thus regarded by Catholics as the essential form of the Christian religion]" (Geiselmann, 389–90; my emphasis; my translation).

⁴³ Himes, "Divinizing the Church," 103.

⁴⁴ Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 71: "Two profoundly opposed ways of understanding the church are found side by side in Möhler's work at the outset of his career. The tension between them may be one important reason why he has exerted such influence on subsequent Catholic theology and especially on ecclesiology."

⁴⁵ Bradford E. Hinze, "Releasing the Power of the Spirit in a Trinitarian Ecclesiology," in *Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology*, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 347–81.

the sources, the “advocates of the forgotten Spirit” can be cleanly identified over and against the proponents of an incarnational-Christocentric approach.⁴⁶ The first group includes Yves Congar, Heribert Mühlen, and Karl Rahner, whereas the second group consists of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Joseph Ratzinger, and Henri de Lubac. These latter figures “are not considered trailblazers of a renewed pneumatology,” states Hinze, for they are instead “the rightful heirs and defenders of Johann Adam Möhler’s later incarnational ecclesiology.”⁴⁷ Their collective fear of “excessive pneumatism” leads them to buttress the sacramental character of the Church’s hierarchical institution and the centralization of its authority, leading Hinze to question whether they do not recapitulate the later Möhler’s “overcorrective.”⁴⁸

To be sure, Hinze voices appreciation for both sets of figures (especially for Balthasar), but the initial classification is still misleading. For one thing, it risks obscuring the full range of constructive efforts made by Möhler’s *nouvelle* successors, in general, to resolve the tensions they perceived in Möhler’s work.⁴⁹ More specifically, and more importantly for this essay, the association of Balthasar, de Lubac, and Ratzinger with a rather rigid incarnational-Christocentrism-*cum*-hierarchical-clericalism ignores the most crucial contribution these particular thinkers bring to Möhler’s later “incarnational ecclesiology”: a robust theology of Mary. Consideration of this theology destabilizes this opposition between a mystical Church manifesting the unity of the Spirit and a visible Church representing Christ’s authority, as I will show. This is not to deny the attention paid to Mary by the “advocates of the forgotten Spirit.” Quite the opposite, in fact, for these too ought to be read with their Marian presuppositions in mind (however else we might appreciate their contributions to pneumatology).⁵⁰ But Balthasar, de Lubac, and

⁴⁶ Hinze, “Releasing the Power of the Spirit,” 353–66.

⁴⁷ Hinze, “Releasing the Power of the Spirit,” 364.

⁴⁸ Hinze, “Releasing the Power of the Spirit,” 366 (cf. 348).

⁴⁹ Hinze acknowledges that “by the end of the twentieth century the exploration of the origins, nature and mission of the church in terms of the trinitarian economy of salvation, and the analogy between the Trinity and the church had moved far beyond that of Möhler and his contemporaries” (“Releasing the Power of the Spirit,” 349). This being the case, how Balthasar, de Lubac, and Ratzinger could be said to remain so neatly aligned with Möhler’s later thought already appears suspicious.

⁵⁰ See below for my discussion of Yves Congar. See also Peter Fritz, “Karl Rahner’s Marian ‘Minimalism,’” in *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*,

Ratzinger are most insistent: the Marian dimension of the Church has become theologically and pastorally indispensable following the developments of the nineteenth century.⁵¹ As such, these successors do not fit nicely on either side of the two-track account. They do not recapitulate the later Möhler so much as they complete the trajectory of his thought.

As we will see, just as Möhler was led to locate the Church’s original union with Christ as part and parcel of the Incarnation, Balthasar, Ratzinger, and de Lubac illuminate the ecclesiological implications of Mary’s role in this event, thereby qualifying the points of identity Möhler had drawn between Christ and the Church. In so doing, they also clarify where the crucial debate with Protestantism truly lies, which is not *first* with the audacity of the visible and hierarchical Church to represent Christ, but rather with the deeper and more fundamental claim of the capacity of postlapsarian humanity per se to cooperate in the divine mission of redemption.⁵² This latter concern was far more consonant with the overall impetus animating *Symbolik* as a whole, however much attention has been paid to the now-legendary few pages on the Church’s authority.⁵³

The Marian Contributions of Balthasar, Ratzinger, and de Lubac

“What is most obviously missing from Möhler’s work,” writes Himes, “is any reference to the *life* of Jesus.”⁵⁴ This is surely an overstatement,⁵⁵

ed. John C. Cavadini and Danielle M. Peters (Notre Dame, ID: Notre Dame University, 2017), 156–78.

⁵¹ Balthasar notes: “It is not without significance that . . . the Marian definitions and those of the First Vatican Council on the place of Peter occurred at the same period; they each support the other and elucidate their real purpose” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, “The Contemporary Experience of the Church,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 2, *Spouse of the Word*, trans. A.V. Littledale with Alexander Dru [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999; original German, 1961], 11–42, at 23–24).

⁵² The most famous of encounters in this regard is Balthasar and Barth’s extended dialogue. See D. Stephen Long, *Saving Karl Barth: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Preoccupation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014).

⁵³ “The core problem with Protestantism according to Möhler is that it fundamentally misunderstands the human being” (Himes, “Introduction,” xvi).

⁵⁴ Himes, “Divinizing the Church,” 104.

⁵⁵ In his *Kirchengeschichte*, Möhler does in fact devote attention to Jesus’s life and his foundation of the Christian community. The historical tone of such work is rather different, of course, from the theological explorations in *Einheit* and

and yet Möhler did not take many cues from the events of Christ's incarnate ministry for the sake of his constructive ecclesiology. Himes points toward the irony: "The incarnation plays a decisive role in the working out of the God-man relation in Möhler's thought, but appeal is always made to the fact of Jesus, not his career."⁵⁶ As I hope to make clear, Balthasar, Ratzinger, and de Lubac each insist that, *even before Christ's earthly career*, Mary's conception of the Word by the Holy Spirit already presents us with the archetypal form of ecclesial existence: the perfect, human, creaturely response to divinity. By appealing to this original form of the Church, these successors thought they could properly order the Petrine, hierarchical office within the life of the *communio* shared by all the faithful. "Those who think that the Church started later," quips Balthasar, "have already missed the heart of the matter."⁵⁷

At the risk of oversimplification, the trio's contributions can be typified as follows (though there are obvious overlaps and nuances that must be made). Balthasar underscores the *pastoral necessity* of emphasizing a Marian form of ecclesial consciousness for the modern Church, the Church after 1870. "In Mary," he quips, "the Church is embodied even before being organized in Peter."⁵⁸ Ratzinger supplies the *scriptural justification* for such a statement, explaining how Mary and Christ are united by "the dynamism of a unity that does not abolish dialogical reciprocity," such as we find in the one-flesh passage of Ephesians.⁵⁹ De Lubac, in turn, demonstrates *Tradition's testimony* of the Mary–Church typology, thus underscoring the

Symbolik. For instance, see Johann Adam Möhler, *Vorlesungen über die Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Reinhold Rieger (Munich: Erich Wegel, 1992), 61–65 ("Zweck der Ankunft Christi. Seine Geschichte").

⁵⁶ Himes, "Divinizing the Church," 104.

⁵⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Catholicity of the Church," in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 157–76, at 164 (the original "Das Katholische an der Kirche" was a lecture given on September 13, 1972, for the Vocations Week of the Archdiocese of Cologne, ed. the Archdiocesan Press Office in Kölner Beiträge 10 [Cologne: Wienend, 1972]).

⁵⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Die marianische Prägung der Kirche," in *Maria heute ehren: Eine theologisch-pastorale Handreichung*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 263–79, at 276; English translation in "The Marian Mold of the Church," in Balthasar and Ratzinger, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, 125–44, at 140.

⁵⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole," in Balthasar and Ratzinger, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, 19–36, at 26.

Virgin's incontrovertible place in "the defense and exposition of the whole Christian mystery."⁶⁰ "The links between our Lady and the Church are not only numerous and close," writes de Lubac, "they are essential and woven from within."⁶¹

Balthasar: Pastoral Necessity

Of the three, Balthasar is perhaps best known for the Marian character of his theology, especially as he emphasized it after Vatican II.⁶² The Council marked a demonstrable shift away from the Marian "maximalism" that had been fomented throughout the nineteenth century as a result of Marian apparitions and consequent popular piety.⁶³ Despite the need for correction, Balthasar feared what would be lost in the heart of the Church if the significance of Mary, the *Kirche im Ursprung*, would be occluded: "Without Mariology, Christianity threatens imperceptibly to become inhuman. The Church becomes functionalistic, soulless, a hectic enterprise without any point of rest, estranged from its true nature by the planners."⁶⁴ Although much of the substance of Balthasar's writing about Mary reflects what he gleaned from Adrienne von Speyr, the eclectic nature of his thought also indicates his indebtedness to the Church Fathers, theological anthropology, and Ignatian spirituality.⁶⁵

Balthasar draws special attention to Möhler in his 1974 *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, but the English title obscures what his original German title made quite plain as far as his authorial intent, the literal translation of *Der antirömische Affekt: Wie lässt sich das Papsttum in der Gesamtkirche integrieren* being *The Anti-Roman Affect*:

⁶⁰ Henri de Lubac, "The Church and Our Lady," in *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006 [original French, 1953]), 314–79, at 315.

⁶¹ De Lubac, "The Church and Our Lady," 316.

⁶² See Aidan Nichols, "Divine Handmaid: The Mother of the Lord," in *Divine Fruitfulness: A Guide through Balthasar's Theology beyond the Trilogy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 229–237; Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Profile: In the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000).

⁶³ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008), 188.

⁶⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Marian Principle," in *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975), 72.

⁶⁵ See Johann Roten, "The Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 65–86.

*How Can the Papacy be Integrated in the Church as a Whole?*⁶⁶ Möhler appears in the middle of a chapter titled “The Petrine Office as the Concrete Representation of the Church,” in which Balthasar develops his interpretation of how the sacramental ministry relates to the deeper spiritual communion of the faithful while also being shared amongst the primate and the episcopate. After discussing some Patristic views of the topic, Balthasar turns to Möhler’s *Einheit*, in which the issue was put in its “most convincing form.”⁶⁷ He first expounds the Church according to Möhler as a spiritual communion of love out of which visible authority emerges organically. He then goes on to admit his appreciation for Möhler’s early vision, just so long as the key qualifications are kept in view, qualifications that Möhler himself came to make over the course of his career regarding the sacramental character and Christological institution of the hierarchical office:

Provided we note that in the end Möhler explicitly recognizes that the primacy was established by Christ, i.e., no longer understands it *merely* as the creative act of ecclesial love under the inspiration of the Spirit [as in *Einheit*], we can accept his basic principle: “The entire system of the Church is therefore nothing but the embodiment of love.”⁶⁸

Balthasar shares the “mature” Möhler’s sense that, if this *communio* is to hold together properly in the way Christ intended, then the visible authority of the Church cannot be simply the result of a spirit of a body creating itself, as in the bare text of *Einheit*; it must be Christological in origin.

At this point, Balthasar turns to Augustine, claiming that the vision for such a Christologically mediated *communio* was put better by the bishop of Hippo than by the Church historian of Tübingen. He does not fail to mention that Möhler himself had directed his readers to Augustine, for whom office in the Church “can only represent unity, can only reconcile those who have fallen from the unity of love and can only receive new members through baptism because this Church

⁶⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Der antirömische Affekt. Wie lässt sich das Papsttum in der Gesamtkirche integrieren* (Freiburg: Herder, 1971); English translation in *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, trans. Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

⁶⁷ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 167–72.

⁶⁸ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 172 (citing *Einheit*, §64).

of love really does exist, despite all her questionable earthly aspects."⁶⁹ Balthasar here supplies a longer treatment of the bishop of Hippo's emphasis on ministry being "established within the all-embracing, holy, immaculate, truly loving Church."⁷⁰

And yet, the Swiss thinker concludes, Augustine failed to clarify an idea that emerges with frequency throughout his work, the idea "that the segment of the *civitas Dei* that is on pilgrimage through historical time becomes the immaculate Bride-Church only in eschatological time."⁷¹ This interpretation of the Church is a problem for Balthasar, who thinks Augustine dislocated the eschatologically pure, spotless bride improperly from its historical point of origin, which is the moment of Christ's Incarnation. The kind of Platonizing Balthasar was loath to endure is here in full effect, as Augustine overextended his commitment to an eschatological *ecclesia* awaiting its consummation. When faced with the perceptual irreconcilability between the pervasiveness of sin in the midst of believers, on the one hand, and on the other, the mystical communion of love in which the exercise of ministry is always Christ's own, Augustine located the Church's purity in the eschaton.

Balthasar opposes such a move. Ecclesiology leads us in the opposite direction, back to the mystery of the Incarnation: "The realized Idea of the Church comes at the beginning; everything subsequent, even ecclesiastical office with its sacred functions, is secondary."⁷² This, as we have seen, is the ecclesiological direction that Möhler himself initiated, but without entirely clarifying how. Importantly, Balthasar makes precisely this point, saying that, beginning with *Einheit* and leading up through *Symbolik*, Möhler properly led his reflections on office in the Church "to a certain point," but that "there a further step becomes necessary."⁷³ The further step, of course, is into the mystery of Mary, consideration of which can situate the sacramental ministry once again within a deeper, spiritual *communio*, but one that

⁶⁹ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 172 (cf. *Einheit*, appendix 13).

⁷⁰ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 183.

⁷¹ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 180.

⁷² Balthasar, "The Marian Mold of the Church," 140.

⁷³ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 167: "The question that claims our attention [i.e., the question of how the "juridical dimension" of the Church relates to the "unanimity of a lived *communio*"] was developed in the most convincing form by Johann Adam Möhler. From his early *Die Einheit in der Kirche* to his mature work, *Symbolik*, he carries it to a certain point, but there a further step becomes necessary."

is undoubtedly visible, human, and perfectly correspondent to the incarnate Word:

Once we grasp that Mary, the Mother and Bride of the Lord, is the only member of the pilgrim Church to correspond to the Church's attribute *immaculata* (Eph 5:27) and that Peter's office is founded on the "Church of love" (Augustine), must we not assume that Mary becomes just as really present in the visible Church at all times *within* Peter's presence in the current office-bearer and *within* the presence of the Twelve (and of Paul) in all the holders of office?⁷⁴

To rephrase the force of this discussion: if, on the one hand, Möhler eventually located the Church's ideal embodiment (the moment it takes "flesh and blood") in the disciples' receptivity to the Word of Christ in the Spirit, and if, on the other hand, Augustine was driven to locate this same ideal Church in the eschaton, then Balthasar sides with Möhler but self-consciously takes "a further step." The disciples receive the Word, to be sure, and are called to obey him by representing his authority for the sake of Christ's own mission, but as Balthasar says, "the Marian experience existed prior to the apostolic experience, and it thus wholly conditions it, for Mary, as Mother of the Head, is also Mother of the Body."⁷⁵

Balthasar's reasoning is resolutely pastoral. Even without a full treatment of the Marian spirituality he develops elsewhere, the significance of Mariology for the Church's self-understanding is clear: "Primarily our aim is to understand as clearly and as fully as possible the *Catholica* as she has *legitimately* understood herself, both objectively and historically (disregarding any deviations), and as she still must understand herself today."⁷⁶ The "today" of which Balthasar speaks is the historical moment following the promulgation of both the Marian dogmas and the infallibility of the Pope. Hence, he makes a plea for a proper restoration of Mariology in relation to the Petrine office: "Let us face the fact . . . [that] balancing *Petrus* with *Maria-ecdesia* is primarily an internal concern of the Catholic Church."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 180.

⁷⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009 [original German, 1961]), 353.

⁷⁶ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 184.

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *The Office of Peter*, 184.

Ratzinger: Scripture's Justification

If Balthasar discerned a pastoral need for seeing the ideal Church of Möhler's *Einheit* as being visibly and truly consummate in the person of Mary, Ratzinger supplied the *scriptural justification* for making this move. Ratzinger shared with Balthasar and de Lubac a concern to correct the confusion, before and after Vatican II, about the meaning of the "Mystical Body." After World War I, Ratzinger notes, new directions for Catholic ecclesiology opened up through this concept: "Like a force of nature, it broke through centuries of ossification."⁷⁸

The lineage for the concept of the "Mystical Body" began with Möhler, but it was shaped by its reception into the Roman School, in which it was mapped onto a false relation between visible and invisible.⁷⁹ The Mystical Body was taken to refer to an invisible Church without tangible earthly substance, thus allowing the Bellarminian definition of the Church to pervade. Conversely, the visible Church, made up of real human members, was not seen as "Mystical" so much as a sociological reality defined by membership and external adherence to the hierarchy. Ratzinger notes that, between the world wars, an ecclesiological collision course had been set:

Theologians had heaped upon the image of the Mystical Body all the glories of the supernatural and thereby created an extremely unrealistic concept. . . . But who could forget for long that the mystical glory remains meaningless, empty talk if the concrete Church presents herself to us as something so completely different?⁸⁰

Each in their own way, then, Balthasar, Ratzinger, and de Lubac discerned that something had slipped from vision: the visible reality of the Mystical Body, no mere metaphor or eschatological hope, but *the Church* in its flesh and blood.

To right the balance, Ratzinger joined Balthasar's mission to resuscitate another metaphor that might put the union between Christ and the veritable community he came to save back in perspective,

⁷⁸ Ratzinger, "The Nature and Limits of the Church," 116.

⁷⁹ See Henri de Lubac, "The Two Aspects of the One Church," in *The Splendor of the Church*, 92–93. De Lubac traces the widely accepted path of Möhler's reception to Perrone, Passaglia, Schrader, Franzelin, and Scheeben. See also Walter Kasper, *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der römische Schule: Giovanni Perrone, Carlo Passaglia, Clemens Schrader* (Freiburg: Herder, 1962).

⁸⁰ Ratzinger, "The Nature and Limits of the Church," 117.

the nuptial metaphor of the Church as bride, which enjoyed a much earlier provenance owing to its use throughout the Old Testament for the people of God, to which Yahweh routinely refers as his bride.⁸¹ The deeper resonances in the New Testament have already been insinuated, as appears in Paul's use of the Genesis "one-flesh" passage. Rightly or wrongly,⁸² the bridal metaphor retrieved by Ratzinger and Balthasar served as a reminder that "what is most authentically ecclesial about the *ecclesia*" is not its exercise of authority, but its spiritual receptivity and dialogical openness to Christ.⁸³ Thus, without going so far as to say that Mary is the singular *hypostasis* of the ecclesial bride, Ratzinger sees Mary as the most fitting exemplar for this imagery:

The Church is the body, the flesh of Christ in the spiritual tension of love wherein the spousal mystery of Adam and Eve is consummated, hence, in the dynamism of a unity that does not abolish dialogical reciprocity. By the same token, precisely the Eucharistic-Christological mystery of the Church indicated in the term "Body of Christ" remains within the proper measure only when it includes the mystery of Mary: the mystery of the listening handmade who—liberated in grace—speaks her *Fiat* and, in so doing, becomes bride and thus body.⁸⁴

As shown here, the logic of Mary becoming body is doubly significant. She becomes Christ's body by becoming part of his Church, but in her particular case, she becomes his body by receiving the Word.

The question lingers: is Mary primarily "bride" or "mother"? Ratzinger wants to say both, but the intelligibility of saying both means we have to read Mary's physical maternity in its theological dimensions, and for Ratzinger, this entails a particular approach to

⁸¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Who Is the Church?" in *Spouse of the Word*, trans. Littledale and Dru, 143–92, at 148–49: "[A] time came when the bride image became blurred and lost its hold on men's minds, and this is true today for the general consciousness of the Church. The analogy of the body has been resuscitated and is again in vogue, but this has not happened to the analogy of the bride."

⁸² See Karen Kilby, "Gender and 'the Nuptial' in Balthasar's Theology," in *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 123–46.

⁸³ Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety," 25.

⁸⁴ Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety," 26.

Scripture: "We must avoid relegating Mary's maternity to the sphere of mere biology. But we can do so only if our reading of Scripture can legitimately presuppose a hermeneutic that rules out just this kind of division and allows us instead to recognize the correlation of Christ and his Mother as a theological reality."⁸⁵ Toward this end, Ratzinger presupposes a gender dualism in his reading of Scripture, such that a "masculine line" and a "feminine line" are distinguished in salvation history, running alongside each other and somehow merging in the mystery of Mary's conception of Christ.⁸⁶ Mary is bride according to Israel's calling; she is mother according to the Christological mystery of redemption.

Ratzinger has been criticized by feminist scholars for reading Scripture this way, since it requires essentializing spiritual dispositions on the basis of biological sex.⁸⁷ That is, Ratzinger takes for granted the incarnate Christ's identification with the *masculine* line of the Old Testament, which leads him to identify Mary's culmination of the *feminine* line according to her receptivity, passivity, and submission to the incarnate Word of God. And so, for Ratzinger, the emphases most proper to the creature as such, when located here in the Christological mystery, are identified with Mary's gendered existence as a woman: "Just as the Adamic line gets its meaning from Christ, the significance of the feminine line, in its indivisible mutual immanence with respect to the mystery of Christ, becomes clear in

⁸⁵ Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety," 29.

⁸⁶ See Mary Frances McKenna, *Innovation within Tradition: Joseph Ratzinger and Reading the Women of Scripture* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015).

⁸⁷ See Heike Harbecke, "Mary and Woman/en: Some Aspects of Joseph Ratzinger's (Benedict XVI's) Mariology in the Light of Gender-Difference Feminism," in *The Many Faces of Mary*, ed. Diego Irarrazabal, Susan Ross, and Marie-Theres Wacker (London: SCM Press, 2008), 126–40; Sidney Callahan, "Ratzinger, Feminist?" *Commonweal* 131 (2004): 9–10; and Sarah Jane Boss, "Francisco Suárez and Modern Mariology," in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 256–78. For feminist readings of Mary in general, see Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* [New York: Continuum, 2003]; Johnson, "The Symbolic Character of Theological Statements about Mary," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22 (1985): 312–35; Johnson, "Mary and the Eternal Face of God," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 500–526; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977); *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Mario Mayo Robbins (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

light of the figure of Mary and of the role of the *ecclesia*.”⁸⁸ Again, the “true center of all history,” Ratzinger notes, is the single figure of Christ-and-Church, such that “Church” here means “the creature’s fusion with its Lord in spousal love, in which its hope for divinization is fulfilled by way of faith.”⁸⁹ Mary is undoubtedly the archetype of such creaturely fusion, but for Ratzinger, she is such by virtue of her *femininity* rather than her *humanity*, since she necessarily shares this with Christ.

The substance of the criticisms against Ratzinger’s gender dualism needs to be taken seriously, but it need not delay discussion here. The question of whether biology determines spirituality can be set aside because, in the end, Ratzinger intends to underscore the reality of Mary’s *motherhood*, but without neglecting its theological dimension:

If, therefore, Christ and *ecclesia* are the hermeneutical center of the scriptural narration of the history of God’s saving dealings with man, *then and only then is the place fixed where Mary’s motherhood becomes theologically significant* as the ultimate personal concretization of Church. . . . She is the personal concretization of the Church because her *Fiat* makes her the bodily Mother of the Lord. But this biological fact is a theological reality, because it realizes the deepest spiritual content of the covenant that God intended to make with Israel.⁹⁰

Put differently, Mary is a unique fulcrum in the history of salvation, for though she stands in continuity with the rest of the members of Israel and is thus called to be Yahweh’s bride in the same manner as they, she is utterly unique in relation to all other Old Testament types by virtue of being *theotokos*, of physically bearing God in the world. This uniqueness also pertains to the spiritual order of Christian ecclesial obedience. And on this score, Mary’s spiritual receptivity to the Word is necessarily of the same quality as that of any other human believer, even if her mission in the Church was radically unique and exclusive, because unrepeatable. This is precisely what makes her exemplary.

⁸⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Sign of the Woman: An Introductory Essay on the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*,” in Balthasar and Ratzinger, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, 37–60, at 43–44.

⁸⁹ Ratzinger, “Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety,” 30.

⁹⁰ Ratzinger, “Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety,” 30 (my emphasis).

With this in mind, Ratzinger maintains that Mariology cannot be fully integrated within Christology or ecclesiology, but is rather a unique sphere of reflection guarding against two extremes that should sound familiar. On the one hand, says Ratzinger, Mary guards against an ecclesial *Christomonism* in which the believer is absorbed into Christ and loses his personal, creaturely autonomy in the order of grace, as if an ontological *identity* could be postulated between the Church and Christ. This is not what Paul intends when saying we are the "body of Christ." On the other hand, Ratzinger also wants to resist the tendency to reduce Christ's appearance on the stage of history, as if his redemptive work excluded the cooperation of the creature in the order of grace. Such a *solus Christus* soteriology is, in many ways, one of the sad results bequeathed upon theology since the Reformation.⁹¹ Indeed, Luther stated quite plainly that Christ's salvific activities took place "by the grace of God alone and the sole working of the Holy Spirit, without any human action."⁹² Against this account, and against the idea of creaturely "absorption," Ratzinger's Mariology points us toward a "dialogical reciprocity" between creature and Creator that is always kept open, but without undermining the reality of the ontological union effected by Christ's Incarnation.⁹³

To sum up, Ratzinger suggests that a rightly understood Mariology clarifies and deepens the concept of Church by opening up the "feminine dimension," by which he really means the affective, receptive disposition of the believer, the inward commitment of loving trust and faith. This dimension "points beyond sociology" to a "dimension wherein the real ground and unifying power of the reality Church first appears."⁹⁴ The Church cannot be considered solely according to its institutional structure because, for Ratzinger (as for Balthasar), this would be to see it as essentially "masculine."⁹⁵ Again, the inherently gendered spirituality here has caused problems for some,⁹⁶ but the crux of the issue ought not be overlooked: as a

⁹¹ Ratzinger, "The Sign of the Woman," 43.

⁹² Cited by Henri de Lubac in "The Church and Our Lady," 314.

⁹³ Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety," 26.

⁹⁴ Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety," 25.

⁹⁵ Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety," 25.

⁹⁶ See Sarah Boss, "Francisco Suárez and Modern Mariology." From my reading of Boss, Suárez's views appear consonant with those of Louis Bouyer, who also draws attention more to Mary's virginal motherhood than to her spousal relation with the Word. This direction proffers similar conclusions about union/distinction between Christ and Church that Ratzinger makes, but without

result of this theological interpretation of Paul's original imagery, the apostolic institution is necessarily relativized and shown to be subordinate to the deeper dimension of a spiritual communion shared by the entire visible Church.

De Lubac: Tradition's Testimony

Finally then, if Ratzinger supplies the scriptural justification by which to locate the bridal and maternal Church first and foremost with the person of Mary, de Lubac corroborates this typology through his exhaustive collation of Tradition's testimony.⁹⁷ In his history of Vatican II, John O'Malley observes that de Lubac's "The Church and Our Lady" (1953) provided "an attractive paradigm" by which to justify the Council's eventual decision to put its statements on Mary within its document on the Church, rather than supply an independent treatise.⁹⁸ The decision was hotly debated, since many of the bishops were at least sensitive to, if not direct proponents of, the "high Mariology" characterizing Catholic faith and piety in the century prior to Vatican II.⁹⁹

Such exalted views of Mary were part and parcel of the confused alignment of the visible/invisible dichotomy with the mystical/sociological dichotomy. For his part, de Lubac insists: "If we talk of a 'sociological Church,' we only accentuate a dichotomy already suspect, without avoiding anything unpleasant in so doing. We must remember that the human element itself, as something essential to the structure and life of the Church as Christ willed her to be, is divine in its foundation."¹⁰⁰ Such comments bring de Lubac's Marian contribution into direct conversation with Möhler's attempt to apply the Chalcedonian definition of Christ to the Church without qualification.¹⁰¹ More specifically, as Möhler strove to apply the *communicatio idiomatum* of Christology to the Church, he understandably, but mistakenly, identified the hierarchy established by Christ as most

essentializing gender differences. See Bouyer, *Woman and Man with God: An essay on the Place of the Virgin Mary in Christian Theology and Its Significance for Humanity*, trans. A.V. Littledale (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960).

⁹⁷ I focus most explicitly on de Lubac's chapter "The Church and Our Lady" in *The Splendor of the Church*.

⁹⁸ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 188.

⁹⁹ Timothy J. Sauppe, "Decoding Vatican II's Marian Paradigm Shift," *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, June 26, 2014, hprweb.com/2014/06/decoding-vatican-iis-marian-paradigm-shift/.

¹⁰⁰ De Lubac, "The Two Aspects of the One Church," 102.

¹⁰¹ See Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 261.

representative for the "divine side" of the exchange of attributes within the divine and human Church.

De Lubac's testimony modifies this idea significantly. Precisely in whom, de Lubac asks, is this Church most divine and human, "without division and without confusion," like Christ himself, "whose body she mystically is"?¹⁰² In his final chapter of *The Splendor of the Church*, he supplies a cascade of responses from the Tradition that summarily point us not to the papacy or to the hierarchical ministry, but to Mary, the Church's "type and model, her point of origin and perfection."¹⁰³ Whereas Möhler applied the Chalcedonian definition to the Church as such, de Lubac refocuses attention instead upon the reciprocal correspondences throughout Tradition between the Church and Mary.

The substance of such testimony supplied crucial material for resituating the hierarchical ministry within the more primary idea of the Mystical Body of all the faithful in union with Christ. For example, in an earlier chapter of *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac lavishes extravagant praise on Matthias Scheeben, who, "like Möhler, died too young to give all that he had in him."¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, de Lubac notes, despite Scheeben's failure to unite the hierarchy and the Mystical Body in proper conjunction, his *Die Mysterien des Christentums* (1885) "stood for a tendency in the right direction," even if, he laments, "the lead was not very much followed."¹⁰⁵ What he means is that the Council fathers of Vatican I and the subsequent Thomistic movement of the twentieth century emphasized "the metaphorical character of the expression, to the point of watering down the realism of the doctrine it contained."¹⁰⁶ By reconnecting the doctrine of the Mystical Body with the human exemplar of Mary, de Lubac modified any exaggerated sense of the Mystical Body as an abstract-yet-

¹⁰² De Lubac, "The Two Aspects of the One Church," 102.

¹⁰³ De Lubac, "The Church and Our Lady," 320. It should be mentioned that de Lubac freely concedes that the early Church's ecclesiology was itself impersonal and not identifiable with Marian contours. Balthasar and Ratzinger both concede the point as well. But this does not mitigate for any of them the conviction by which the Church was led to see this impersonal ecclesiology as perfectly refracted in the person of Mary. See Troy Stefano, "Catholica Mater: The Marian Insights of Henri de Lubac," in Cavadini and Peters, *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, 179–203.

¹⁰⁴ De Lubac, "The Two Aspects of the One Church," 93.

¹⁰⁵ De Lubac, "The Two Aspects of the One Church," 93.

¹⁰⁶ De Lubac, "The Two Aspects of the One Church," 95.

somehow-“divine” hypostasis of Spirit or Christ underwriting the hierarchy’s activities. It was to Scheeben’s credit, suggests de Lubac, that he discerned a “perichoretic” relationship between the dogma of infallibility and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.¹⁰⁷ The two belong together, lest the more original form of the Church be lost in abstraction.

Finally, given the importance of de Lubac’s Eucharistic theology for ecclesiology, it should not be missed that he draws an intriguing parallel between Mary’s maternity with respect to Christ and the Church’s maternity with respect to the Eucharist.¹⁰⁸ Even if the sacramental priesthood has indeed been *divinely* instituted by Christ himself to perpetuate his living presence in the sacraments, the Marian dimension nevertheless re-situates the sacramental hierarchy within the body of all the faithful. As he puts in another chapter of *The Splendor of the Church*:

Let it be said once more, therefore, that the institution of the priesthood and the sacrament of Orders do not create, within the Church, two degrees of membership of Christ and two different species of Christians, as it were. This is a fundamental truth of the faith. The priest is not, in virtue of his priestly ordination, more of a Christian than the ordinary believer; the Order he has received is for the sake of the Eucharist, but the Eucharist is for the sake of everyone. All are called, as from this present world, to the same divine life.¹⁰⁹

Toward that end, Mary is undoubtedly “a member of the Church, but she is the first, principal, and highest member, and this uniquely and in so eminent a sense that we may also say . . . that the Church belongs to her.”¹¹⁰

Receiving Möhler in a Marian Key

The historiography concerning Möhler’s reception by the *nouvelle théologie* and the ecclesiology of Vatican II is incomplete if it fails to attend to the Marian theology presupposed by this movement’s repre-

¹⁰⁷ De Lubac, “The Church and Our Lady,” 328.

¹⁰⁸ De Lubac, “The Church and Our Lady,” 334–35.

¹⁰⁹ De Lubac, “The Heart of the Church,” in *The Splendor of the Church*, 126–60, at 143.

¹¹⁰ De Lubac, “The Church and Our Lady,” 334–35.

sentative thinkers. Certainly, in the case of the three discussed above, the Marian dimension problematizes a "two-track" hypothesis about Catholic ecclesiology by relocating this false dichotomy within a theological dimension that Möhler himself did not consider, even as it resolves a number of his tensions. At one point in Himes's review of said tensions, it sounds as if he might open up this dimension when he observes that, for Möhler, "the manner of the Son's relation to humanity determines the manner of the church because the moment of his union with humanity is the moment of the church's birth."¹¹¹ But no further comment is directed toward the question of Mary's conception of the Word in the Incarnation.

At any rate, this lack of scholarly attention to the Marian presuppositions in which the *nouvelle* thinkers received Möhler is surprising, for the Marian aspect also resolves questions about other figures besides those discussed here. In the case of Möhler's most important twentieth-century disciple, Yves Congar, Mary is indispensable to the historical-theological puzzle of his overall project in ecclesiology. For instance, despite the value of James Lee's recent article on Möhler's reception by Congar, no attention is given to the way Mary affects Congar's ideas about the Church in general, to say nothing of how Mary affects his reception of Möhler specifically.¹¹² Some consideration in this regard would fruitfully complicate Lee's overall thesis that, although Congar initially thought the ecclesiology of *Einheit* could harmonize with the already well-received account of *Symbolik*, he eventually came to see these as incompatible, in the sense that, as far as Congar was concerned, "ecclesiology must be pneumatologically and not incarnationally centered."¹¹³ "For the mature Congar," Lee contends, "the church is not the continued incarnation of Christ, wherein the hierarchy function as the essential link between Christ and the present day church."¹¹⁴

I would argue that such a reading obfuscates the fact that, as early as 1952, Congar had already identified and dissociated himself from

¹¹¹ Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, 257.

¹¹² James Ambrose Lee II, "Shaping Reception: Yves Congar's Reception of Johann Adam Möhler," *New Blackfriars* 97 (2016): 693–712. See also the work beyond which Lee seeks to advance: Thomas F. O'Meara, "Beyond Hierarchology: Johann Adam Möhler and Yves Congar," in *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, ed. Donald Dietrich and Michael Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 173–91.

¹¹³ Lee, "Shaping Reception," 709 (cf. 696).

¹¹⁴ Lee, "Shaping Reception," 709.

the problems inherent in both *Einheit* and *Symbolik*. As he wrote in *Christ, Our Lady and the Church*:

We must not think of the Church . . . simply as a kind of incarnation of the Holy Spirit comparable with that of the Word made Flesh, nor even, properly speaking, as the extension of the Incarnation. Both these modes of thought . . . need qualification if a due proportion is to be accurately maintained in the elements of which the Church, as such, is composed. For by its very nature it is ever compacted of that which is human and that which is divine, reflecting thereby the likeness of Christ.¹¹⁵

Considering the terms of the present essay, it is crucial to observe that, in context, these words follow from what Congar had just written about *Mary*:

[She] is purely human, and her glorified humanity, a ground of hope that ours will one day be like hers, carries back our understanding to the sacred and glorified humanity of Christ, in the likeness of which hers was victorious over sin and death. So far from lending itself, when properly understood, to any tendency to Monophysitism, Catholic belief about the graces conferred on our Lady serves to confirm the Apostolic faith clearly proclaimed by the Council of Chalcedon.¹¹⁶

Indeed, prior to de Lubac's *Splendor of the Church* (1953), with its influential chapter on "The Church and Our Lady," Congar had already reflected his own appreciation for how a Mary–Church typology overcomes the theological pitfalls of an unqualified account of the Church as *either* the Incarnation of the Spirit *or* the extension of the Word made flesh.

Hence, Christopher Ruddy is right to suggest that, although Congar was "more reactive than constructive" with regard to Mariology as a distinct theological locus, we should also appreciate that he was quite constructive *in an explicitly Marian direction* with the ecclesiology he inherited from Möhler.¹¹⁷ In a review from 1950, Congar

¹¹⁵ Yves Congar, *Christ, Our Lady and the Church*, trans. Henry St. John (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957; [original French, 1952]), 55.

¹¹⁶ Congar, *Christ, Our Lady and the Church*, 54.

¹¹⁷ Christopher Ruddy, "A Very Considerable Place in the Mystery of Christ and

wrote of there being good reason to insist "sur la nécessaire jonction de la mariologie et de l'ecclésiologie, clef, à notre avis, de bien des difficultés [on the necessary conjunction of Mariology and ecclesiology, the key in our opinion, to many difficulties]." ¹¹⁸ Furthermore, if Congar stands in basic agreement with the Marian augmentation of Möhler's later ecclesiology described above, as I suggest he does, then it was entirely fitting for him to discourage Marian "maximalism" going into the Second Vatican Council. ¹¹⁹ Such insistence makes sense when we consider (a) his concerns about the possibilities for ecumenical dialogue and (b) his insistence, *early and late*, that Mary is first and foremost the ecclesia's *human* exemplar par excellence, the model of the believing creature, corresponding perfectly *in her humanity* to "the sovereign action of the Spirit in Christ." ¹²⁰

the Church'? Yves Congar on Mary," in Cavadini and Peters, *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, 113–32, at 126.

¹¹⁸ Yves Congar, "Mariologie" [review of a 1947 republication of P. Terrien's *La Mère de Dieu, La Mère des hommes*], *Bulletin de Théologie Dogmatique, Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 34 (1950): 640 (my translation).

¹¹⁹ See for instance, Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, trans. Mary John Ronayne and Mary Cecily Boulding (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012 [original French, 2002]), 315 (entry for September 18, 1963): "The mariological *zelanti* would like 'to add new flowers' to Mary's crown. This maximising theology is not healthy. IT WOULD BE MUCH BETTER TO DO NOTHING."

¹²⁰ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols., trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 2015 [originally 1979–1980]), 1:164. Despite the brevity of his discussion of Mary in this volume, Congar hardly backs away from his commitment to Mary as "the model of the Church," as can be found throughout his career. In his mature *opus* on pneumatology, then, he flatly admits the validity of Protestant concerns about Catholic extravagances with regard to Mary, especially as if she could replace the Holy Spirit, but then he goes on to insist: "The Christian mystery would lack an important dimension if it excluded or passed over the part played by Mary. Mary is the first recipient of grace and the first to have been associated with the sovereign action of the Spirit in Christ. Protestants are right to reject an attribution to Mary of what belongs only to God, but they are wrong if they remain closed to the witness borne by Catholic and Orthodox Christians to the benefit in their lives in Christ of a discreet Marian influence" (1:164).

In his *Journal*, Congar recorded his immediate impressions after Pope Pius XII's speech in which he rather ambiguously announced Mary as the Mother of the Church (*Mater Ecclesiae*). Congar notes: "The enthusiastic applause was very strongly supported by the mob of insignia-bearers and the various members of the papal court. They gave the impression of believing that the Pope had just made a dogmatic definition. But a definition OF WHAT? What is the CONTENT of 'Mater Ecclesiae'???" (*My Journal of the Council*, 696 [entry

Barth, it should be noted in conclusion, saw all these connections quite clearly. In the same volume of his *Dogmatics* in which he calls Möhler's reading of Schleiermacher a genuinely "Catholic improvement," mentioned above, the Swiss thinker also explains that Mariology is the Catholic solution to all the difficulties regarding the role of humanity, and the earthly Church specifically, with respect to the divine work of redemption. Or, as he puts it somewhat less favorably, Mariology constitutes "the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest."¹²¹ Why "heresy"? Because, for Barth, "the problem to which the Roman Catholic doctrine of grace and the Church, to which Mariology in particular is the so-called answer, i.e., the problem of creaturely co-operation in God's revelation and reconciliation, is at once a spurious problem, the sole answer to which can be false doctrines."¹²² Of course, if the problem is *not* spurious, then Barth's comment is perhaps still perspicacious: Mariology "explains all the rest." It is at least telling that de Lubac used Barth's objection to introduce his own chapter on Mary, conceding the point freely: "Catholic faith regarding our Lady sums up symbolically, in its special case, the doctrine of human cooperation in the Redemption and thus provides the synthesis, or matrix concept, as it were, of the dogma of the Church."¹²³

Conclusion

Were we to exclude consideration of Mariology after Möhler, a two-track hypothesis of Catholic ecclesiology might be feasible. However, by retracing Möhler's own developments in the first section, I have shown that the theologian of Tübingen himself never posited two tracks, since he actively attended to problems emerging from his fresh explorations in the way the pilgrim Church on earth re-presents and extends Christ's saving work for all of humanity. Subsequently, I have shown that Balthasar, Ratzinger, and de Lubac were most true to Möhler's own trajectory when they pressed ecclesiological reflection into the mystery of Incarnation, taking the "further step" of elaborating the significance of Mary for the Church today.

for "Strasbourg, 22 November 1964"]]. See also O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 283.

¹²¹ Karl Barth, *CD* vol. I/2, 143.

¹²² Karl Barth, *CD* vol. I/2, 146.

¹²³ De Lubac, "The Church and Our Lady," 316.

Generally speaking, the literature concerning Möhler and his significance for modern Catholic ecclesiology rarely connects his work to the Marian contributions of his twentieth-century successors, despite the fact that each of the thinkers discussed here pointed to Mariology as the only way to make sense of both the unity *and the necessary distinction* between the identity of Christ the Head and the body of his pilgrim Church on earth. This scholarly oversight is unfortunate for two reasons. First, excluding the Marian augmentation of Möhler's overall ecclesiology makes it far too easy to perpetuate a false dichotomy between a "top-down," pejoratively "hierarchical" Church, rigidly fixed in place, and a "bottom-up," laudably "progressive" Church, flexibly moved by the Spirit. Simply put, this dualism is not Catholic.

Secondly, a failure to appreciate *why* Möhler's successors developed the Mariology they did makes it far too easy to judge them for making too much of Mary's place in the nuptial metaphor of the Church as the bride of Christ, despite this metaphor being clearly found in Scripture. It is somewhat ironic that, by explicating Mary's place in the "profound mystery" of ecclesial unity with Christ precisely so as to *subordinate* the hierarchical ministry properly, Balthasar and the others bequeathed such a theological and pastoral knife-edge. That is to say, theologically, it can be admitted that Balthasar and Ratzinger failed to make clear that Mary is not the unique hypostasis of the ecclesial "bride" any more than any other believer, since her exclusive calling pertains to her virginal *motherhood*, and this surely ought not imply some kind of mystical, sexual union on her part, as a *human woman*, with God. Pastorally speaking, the obvious confusion surrounding this topic has prompted a strong reaction from feminist scholars disturbed by the gender implications of this line of thought. And yet, again, the historical-theological context that would most assuage some of this fallout has been forgotten, as well as what animated, for example, Balthasar's *ressourcement* of a Marian ecclesiology after Möhler in the first place. In sum, if Balthasar, Ratzinger, and de Lubac succeeded in advancing the Church's sense of identity beyond Möhler, resolving his basic tensions, they undoubtedly provoked new questions for the Church in the process. Such is the way of theological reasoning when engaged from within a living communion of faith. N&V