

Toward the Renewal of Mariology

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IT IS a well-known fact that there existed two opposing camps at Vatican II regarding a document on Mary.¹ A large number of the council Fathers wanted to prepare a separate document on her, while others, keeping in mind that the Church was the overarching theme of the Council, preferred to include the Marian mystery in the mystery of Christ and the Church. At the Council, the latter trend won by a narrow margin the procedural vote on inserting the document on Mary as the last (eighth) chapter of the dogmatic constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*).

Given the Council's focus on the Church, this integration was quite reasonable theoretically; in practice, however, it had unfortunate consequences. The mass media misinterpreted the inclusion as an obvious sign that the Council intended to de-emphasize the importance of Mary, and this interpretation has spread also among a large number of the clergy and laity. Moreover, after the Council, the biblical renewal contracted until the historical-critical method gained an almost complete dominance over the mainstream of Catholic biblical scholarship. Thus, most systematic theologians felt suspended in an airless vacuum, deprived of the support of Scripture. It is, then, understandable why Mariology courses were dropped from the curriculum of the majority of Catholic seminaries, colleges, and universities. Where they survived, they did so only as electives rather than as part of a sequence of courses required for ordination. A product of an ecumenical task force, *Mary in the New Testament*—a text which raised doubts about the scriptural foundations of all Marian doctrines except for Jesus' virginal conception—became the

¹ This essay is a modified form of a keynote address at the founding symposium of the Academy of Catholic Theology, Washington, DC, May, 2008.

favorite source for these electives.² Added to these theoretical challenges was the practical difficulty for those professors who tried to follow the procedure of the Council and integrate Mariology into a course on ecclesiology. These professors routinely ran out of time over the semester, and, since it would inevitably fall to the last unit in the course, the interpretation of the eighth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* was either omitted or hastily summarized during the last one or two classes.

In spite of such a generally negative trend, those who had been the best Marian theologians before the Council continued their studies of Mary. Instead of working with a few biblical proof texts in support of the Marian dogmas, they looked at the whole of the Bible in the light of patristic exegesis and discovered Mary's role in the whole of salvation history. They have shown convincingly that without the Marian mystery the central doctrines of Christianity become distorted. I mention here only the most important names: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Louis Bouyer, André Feuillet, René Laurentin, Henri de Lubac, Ignace de la Potterie, Hugo Rahner, Josef Ratzinger, and Otto Semmelroth.³ We should also include here the Marian documents of the Magisterium, which attempted to revitalize and enrich Marian piety with the ecclesiological Marian doctrine of the Council: Pope Paul's discourse at the conclusion of the Council in which he declared Mary the Mother of the Church, his apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, and Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*. Meanwhile, in the last few decades a new generation of Catholic youth, inspired by the deep Marian piety of John Paul II, began to search for a deeper understanding of the mystery of Mary. Thus, we sense today a real need in the Church for a renewed Mariology.

² Ed. Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & John Reuman (Fortress-Paulist: Philadelphia, New York, 1978).

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama. Theological Dramatic Theory*, Vol. 3, *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 271–360; *Mary for Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987). Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger, *Mary—The Church at the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1965). Louis Bouyer, *The Seat of Wisdom* (Chicago: Regnery, 1965). André Feuillet, *Études johanniques* (Paris: Desclée, 1962). George Jouassard, “Marie à travers la patristique,” in *Marie I–III*, ed. D’Hubert Du Manoir, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1949), 69–157. René Laurentin, *Luc I–II* (Paris, 1954); *Court traité sur la Vierge Marie* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1967) and *The Question of Mary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1965); Ignace De la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (New York: Alba House, 1992). Hugo Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1964), esp. 13–87. *Our Lady and the Church* (Chicago: Regnery, 1965). Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983). Otto Semmelroth, *Mary, Archetype of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

My goal in this essay is to outline some of the key issues in a systematic Mariology while incorporating the insights of the above-mentioned biblical and patristic scholars, who contributed most to its renewal in the period before and after Vatican II. At the same time, I will attempt to show how the truths regarding Mary safeguard and deepen our understanding of the central mysteries of the faith. Such a presentation cannot avoid the charge of being a maximalist Mariology—or the objection that in this essay defined dogmas and mere theological conclusions are inseparably amalgamated. My only defense is that I have attempted to draw the contours of the integral mystery of Mary, the different components of which have been taught by the Church with various levels of certainty and precision. My essay is “maximalist” not in the sense of emphasizing Mary’s privileges in contrast to the rest of humankind, but rather in presenting Mary as the anticipation and guarantee of the eschatological glory of the human race.

The article is divided into the following eight sections: (1) Mary’s significance in the universal history of salvation and in the history of Israel’s faith; (2) Mary ever virgin and mother of God; (3) Mary becoming the mother of the Church; (4) the glorification of Mary’s body in its eschatological and cosmic significance; (5) the anthropological implications of the mystery of Mary; (6) Mary and the autonomy of creation; (7) Mary and the Holy Spirit; (8) a christocentric Marian spirituality.

1. Mary’s Significance in the Universal History of Salvation and in the History of Israel’s Faith

The New Eve: Mary in Universal History

The theme of Mary as the new Eve, implied by the New Testament,⁴ discloses her role within the universal history of humankind.⁵ Reasoning within the logic of faith, we discover the “necessity” of the Immaculate Conception.⁶ Similar to the first Eve, who was not created as a new

⁴ See on this theme A. Feuillet, “L’heure de la femme (Jn 16,21) et l’heure de la Mère de Jésus (Jn 19,25–27),” *Biblica* 47 (1966): 169–84, 361–80, 557–73.

⁵ To the Anglicans who believed that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was a recent invention of the papacy, Cardinal Newman pointed out that its truth has been implicit in the faith of the Church from the beginning. It has been implied in the parallelism and contrast between Mary and Eve as attested in the writings of the second-century apostolic fathers Justin (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 100) and Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 3,22 & 5,19). If Eve was created in grace without sin, how could the new Eve who has reversed by her obedience the disobedience of the first Eve be created in original sin? Cf. John Henry Newman, *The New Eve* (Westminster MD: Newman Press, 1952) 14–33.

⁶ By “necessity” I mean the reasons of appropriateness that faith discovers in the harmony of the mysteries.

beginning but took her origin from Adam, the new Eve, Mary, is conceived as the first and most perfect fruit of the Son's redemptive work. In that sense Dante rightly addresses her as "*Filia del tuo Figlio*." On the one hand, God enabled Mary's Immaculate Conception (her being created in grace and being preserved from original sin from the first moment of her conception) in view of her Son's future redemptive work; on the other, Mary's free, unconditional "Yes" to God's offer of redemption was the condition for the Son's Incarnation. Thus, through his undeserved grace, God renewed the human race and initiated an immaculately pure and new beginning within a human history marked by escalating sinfulness. At the same time, God's grace enabled the human race to renew itself from within, through the free and full acceptance of God's will by the new Eve.

While the Immaculate Conception constitutes Mary's unique privilege, she has received it as a sign which guarantees and anticipates the holiness of the whole Church at the end of time. Made also the mother of all believers by her Son, the *Immaculata* is anxious to share with all of us her purity and grace. Her motherly activity and concern will not cease until the last of the elect is fully purified and sanctified.⁷

We see more clearly the significance of the Immaculate Conception if we attempt to conceive of salvation history without it. Had Mary been stained by personal or by original sin even for the shortest period of time, she would not have been an utterly new beginning. Moreover, the overabundant grace obtained by the Redeemer would not have been fully and freely received by God's creation; there would not have been a truly worthy, free human "partner" for God, one who would give a worthy response to the Incarnate Son of God.

Additionally, without Mary's Immaculate Conception the Church could not have fully appropriated Christ's sacrifice, which she celebrates in the Eucharist. The disciples (the official hierarchy of the Church) received the command to perform the Eucharistic sacrifice in memory of Jesus at the Last Supper. It is Mary, however, who accepted fully the sacrifice of her Son at the foot of the Cross. Her consent to the Father's will, by which she accepts her Son's self-donation to the Father in our stead and for our sake, is full and wholehearted because she is the *Immaculata*, the one conceived without original sin and full of grace; her "Yes" of

⁷ St. Maximilian Kolbe liked to highlight the significance of Mary's self-designation to Bernadette Soubirous. She does not say "I am the one who has been immaculately conceived," but "I am the Immaculate Conception." In other words it does not concern only herself but it posits a new beginning for all believers. Cf. Kolbe, *Saint of the Immaculate*, ed. Francis M. Kalvelage (New Bedford MA: Franciscans of the Immaculate, 2001), 109.

acceptance, is not weakened or divided by any sinful tendency. In this way, Mary, who was fully redeemed in advance by her Son's sacrifice, makes the sacrifice of her Son thoroughly her own. And insofar as Mary is the archetype and the beginning of the Church, the sacrifice of Christ has through her become existentially the Church's sacrifice. In the words of Balthasar:

The patristic phrase "*personam ecclesiae gerens*," "*in persona Ecclesiae*," denotes a kind of representation that is truly valid only when the role that is played (*persona*) portrays precisely the subjectivity of the Bride-Church. But how could a sinner be capable of playing this role, which demands spotless love? The disposition he would have to portray would necessarily always be something high above him, an ideal that had not been realized, so that it would not be possible anywhere for the Church to play the role assigned to her in Christ's sacrifice in keeping with what was expected. This is why the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is a strict postulate of ecclesiology. . . . The assent of the *Ekklesia* to the sacrifice of the Son must press on until it reaches Mary's perfect selflessness, so that this agreement may not retain any stain of the egotism that allows Jesus the Paschal Lamb to be slain for one's own redemption and perfection.⁸

Mary is full of grace yet passible and mortal; the innocence of Paradise and her fullness of grace make her most sensitive to the sins of the fallen human race and to its psychic and physical sufferings. On the one hand, the closer we are to God the more keenly we sense and abhor the evil of sin, but the more closely we want to embrace the sinner in order to rescue him. On the other, our sinfulness inclines us to rationalize the evil of sin while recoiling from solidarity with the sinner. All this helps us understand why we can never really grasp how much Mary suffered while living among us and how close she felt and feels to each one of us.

The essentially dialogical nature of human personhood reveals to us another consequence of the Immaculate Conception. In his human development, the incarnate Son of God needed someone who understood him, responded to him, and purely returned his pure love. Without her, Jesus would have been utterly lonely and misunderstood by all. Although Mary could not fully understand her Son's behavior, his words and actions, her purity of faith and fullness of grace always enabled her to reach out to him. When she presented the baby Jesus in the Temple,

⁸ *Theological Explorations*, vol. III (San Francisco: Ignatius 1991), 239–240. The two paragraphs above are a modified version of my article "The Eucharist and the Mission of the Church in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar" in *Love Alone Is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar As Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition*, ed. David L. Schindler, vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 7–8.

Simeon's prophecy must truly have pierced her heart. When after three days Mary and Joseph find the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, she gently reproaches him: "Son, why did you do this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety?" Instead of apologizing, Jesus' response opens up the infinite gap which separates the Son of God from his parents: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in what belongs to my Father?" Mary does not understand, but she keeps these words in her heart (Lk 2:48–51). When Jesus' relatives and his mother arrive in Capernaum, stand outside the house where he is teaching his disciples, and ask for him, he acts as if he has disowned her and his brothers. Instead of going out to receive them, he looks around at his disciples and declares: "Behold my mother and my brothers. For he who does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk 3:31–34). Luke's Gospel suggests to us the purpose of Jesus' apparent rejection of his mother: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it" (8:21). From Luke's portrayal of Mary, it becomes evident that the perfect example of the one who listens to the word of God and acts on it is Mary herself (Lk 2:19, 2:51). This, then, is the way Jesus challenges the faith of his mother: Just as she conceived the Son of God by her faith, she can be united with Him only by acknowledging the infinite gap between them and then by bridging it time and again through her growing faith. Indeed, it is Mary's Immaculate Conception and her consequent fullness of grace that enable her always to catch up with her Son and, in the end, to become fully united with Him under the Cross in the very act of renouncing Him and offering Him to the Father.

Mary in the History of Israel's Faith

While Mary as the "new Eve" reveals her role in the universal history of humankind at large, the theme of the "virgin Daughter of Zion" whom the Lord espouses at the end of history reveals that Mary is the fulfillment of the hope of Israel. Just as the themes of Israel as son of God (Ex 4:22–3, Hos 11:1), son of man (Ezekiel *passim*, Dn 7:13, 18, 22), and servant (Is 42:1, 49:3, 50:10, 52:13) serve as keys to understanding the figure of Jesus, so does the roller-coaster history of Israel's faith beginning with Abraham and Sarah and ending in the redemption of the chastened Daughter of Zion prepare us to appreciate Mary's "*Fiat*" as the full flowering of this faith. With Irenaeus we can look at the whole of Israel's history as God's *paidagogia*, the tough, patient, and faithful education of a wild, nomadic people toward an unconditional and full gift of themselves to God. After Israel learned that YHWH is not a sexual being, she could understand that

in spite of all her infidelities, God promised to unite her to himself in a virginal marriage “in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy” (Hos 2:18–20). This virginal marriage will be fruitful: in the end the barren virgin Daughter Zion will bear many children. God’s promises begin to be fulfilled “in the humility of the house in Nazareth” in the virgin named Mary, who embodies “holy Israel, the pure remnant.”⁹ The Incarnation of the Son of God, then, is not an unexpected meteor falling to the earth without any preparation or free human cooperation. In Mary’s response to God’s offer of salvation, the Covenant with Israel obtains its ultimate fulfillment:

At the moment when she pronounces her Yes, Mary is Israel in person; she is the Church in person and as a person. She is the personal concretization of the Church because her Fiat makes her the bodily Mother of the Lord.¹⁰

Cardinal Dulles insisted in a recent article that we should save ecumenism from itself. In other words, we should stop bracketing or blurring the differences which separate us. Thus, to our Jewish dialogue partners we should make clear not only that we believe in Jesus as the second Adam, the first born of redeemed humankind in general, but that we also see in him the eschatological Israel, the eternal Israel of God. Furthermore, we should point out to them that for us Mary is the “*gloria Jerusalem, laetitia Israel et honorificentia populi nostri*.”¹¹ In other words, we honor in Mary the fulfillment of Israel’s faith, a faith that drew into her womb the Son of the Most High.

2. Mary Ever Virgin and Mother of God

For Luke, Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus reveals that he is the second Adam (cf. Lk 3:23–38), the source and model of a new creation resulting from God’s creative act.¹² This new beginning could not have been brought about by man’s initiative. Mary’s womb is thus prefigured by the

⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, “Homily on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception,” (Zenit.org Dec 14, 2005).

¹⁰ J. Ratzinger, “Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole,” in von Balthasar and Ratzinger, *Mary—The Church at the Source*, 30.

¹¹ From the Graduale of the Mass of the Immaculate Conception in the Roman Missal.

¹² A part of this section is a modified version of a portion of my *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology* (New York: Alba House, 2002), “The Death and Resurrection of Jesus,” 74–75.

void over which the Spirit of God was hovering and bringing forth life at the dawn of the first creation (Gn 1:2): “The Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Lk 1:35). For Matthew the creative act of the Holy Spirit aims at bringing forth the Savior who will free his people from their sins (Mt 1:21). Thus both in Matthew and Luke the virginal conception reveals that man and woman left to their own power can neither produce the new humanity (Luke), nor obtain forgiveness for sin (Matthew). Jesus the Savior, “the holy offspring,” is not the fruit of human love but the fruit of God’s love for humankind. He is purely and entirely a gift that could not be obtained by human efforts, even by the graced intercourse of a saintly husband and wife. At the same time, however, the Gift is not bestowed on a loveless couple who claim to love only God but not each other. The marriage of Mary and Joseph is real, the Child is truly their child and it is precisely the incarnate God the Son who unites them more than we could ever be united by marital intercourse. It will be mainly Joseph’s task to initiate Jesus into the traditions of his people, to teach him to read the Scriptures while both will be astonished by Jesus’ growing wisdom and unfolding love for his heavenly Father.

It is remarkable that no Christian theologian denies the Pauline doctrine of justification by God’s free initiative of grace alone, whereas many question the factuality of Jesus’ virginal conception. This is all the more surprising given the intimate connection between the two: the virginal conception of Jesus is the historical realization and revelation of the absolutely gratuitous character of God’s saving grace.

In Luke, the virginal conception reveals not only the radically gratuitous character of God’s gift in Jesus, but also his divine sonship. In Luke 1:34–35, the dialogue between Mary and the angel Gabriel makes it clear that Jesus is to be called Son of God precisely because he is going to be conceived virginally by the power of the Holy Spirit. “Son of God” as used here clearly means more than Messianic sonship: Jesus is “*to gennomenon hagion*,” “the holy offspring” (1:35), conceived by the Holy Spirit. He belongs so radically to God that human fatherhood is excluded; his father is God alone.¹³ The virginal conception, then, shows that the whole being and life of Jesus—without any “remainder”—expresses his filial relationship to his heavenly Father. All that Jesus is reveals the Father in heaven. We can shed more light on Jesus’ divine sonship by comparing our situation to his. We are children of our earthly father first, and it is only in addition to this natural relationship that we become, through grace, children

¹³ Yet Joseph is more than a foster father. A foster father must compete with an absent but real birth father. God has no rival in Joseph, who rather reflects the heavenly Father’s love for His Son.

of God. Therefore, all that we are and do does not and cannot “speak” about our heavenly Father. Much in us simply reflects our earthly father. Jesus, on the contrary, is the complete and unsurpassable revelation of the Father, because his whole human being and life reveal Him.

The Fathers insisted that Mary’s virginity remained even in giving birth to Jesus (*virginitas in partu*). Although they refrained from describing its physiological aspect, they extolled the preservation of her bodily integrity as the sign of the inward, virginal integrity of her soul. Most contemporary theologians are too embarrassed to take this traditional view seriously. But St. Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century already considered Jesus’ birth from Mary as one of the three mysteries that remained hidden from the prince of this world and took place in the silence of God.¹⁴ This birth had to be real, from the womb of the Virgin Mary, yet different from all other births. Every other birth is a birth unto death; the first moment of the baby’s life is the first moment in moving closer to death. Without Jesus, this imminent physical death would be the beginning and sign of eternal spiritual death. In contrast, Jesus’ birth was an event of pure joy, the first advance in the conquest of death and delivery of eternal life to us. On account of the psychosomatic unity of the human being, we must also affirm that in some way Mary’s bodily integrity was preserved in childbirth.¹⁵

While Gnostic Christian documents also attest Mary’s perpetual virginity, they distort its meaning: Mary is believed to have remained a virgin because sexual relations that produce offspring and thereby increase matter are evil. The patristic argument for the perpetual virginity of Mary was not based on Gnostic doctrine but on the Christian understanding of virginity as a total consecration to God in pure faith and undivided love. The Fathers interpret Luke 1:34 as expressing the firm intention (or vow) of Mary to dedicate herself to God as a virgin; such a dedication must be total and irrevocable. They also saw in the womb of Mary the New Ark of God overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, the New Temple forever sanctified by God’s presence. No man may enter this sanctuary, since God has made it his own.¹⁶ Thus, it was unthinkable for them that Mary, totally

¹⁴ Ephesians 19:1.

¹⁵ The painful birth of the Woman in Revelation 12:2 does not refer to the birth in Bethlehem, but to the birth pangs of Mary at the foot of the Cross as she completes the birth of the Messiah (Jn 16:21; 19:26–27).

¹⁶ Ezek 44:1–3 often served as a basis for such an interpretation. This view is a further development of the Old Testament’s perspective on cultic holiness. The High Priest who served in the sanctuary, as well as any soldier who fought in a holy war on behalf of Yahweh, had to abstain from sexual intercourse. In later Judaism, legends developed that Moses did not have sexual relations with his wife

consecrated to God by her Son, would compromise this consecration by sexual relations.¹⁷

3. Mary Becoming the Mother of the Church

Mary's divine and ecclesial motherhood, her role as the new Eve, is beautifully intimated by John 19:25–27, as seen against the background of Revelation 12:1–9. Jesus is hanging on the Cross, and at the foot of the Cross stands Mary and the Beloved Disciple. Here, by consenting to the total gift of her Son, Mary completes her task of giving birth to the Messiah, the king of Israel who will rule the nations with an iron rod (Rv 12: 5). The initial, joyful birth in Bethlehem was not simply a biological process; Mary conceived Jesus by faith, as Augustine liked to repeat.¹⁸ Jesus' birth from her womb was God's response to her unconditional *Fiat*.¹⁹ Similarly, Mary's presence at the Cross on which her Son is lifted up is not a passive standing-by but rather the expression of her consent to her Son's sacrifice. In fact, Mary completes the task of her divine motherhood when, at Jesus' words "Woman, behold your son!" she receives, in place of Jesus, the Beloved Disciple as her own child and, in him, all believers as well. This final birth of Jesus from Mary is not the joyful, painless birth at Bethlehem, but a painful labor amidst loud wailing (Rv 12:2). Thus, at the foot of the Cross, Mary's motherhood is stretched out far and wide without boundaries; it embraces all the disciples of Jesus, and it offers her motherly embrace to all peoples and influences by her prayers the entire course of human history.²⁰

Thus, Mary becomes both the Mother of the Church and the most perfect, concrete image of the Church: *Mater Ecclesiae et Mater Ecclesia*. What Mary did in both flesh and Spirit by giving birth to the Head of the Church, the Church does every day in the Spirit: she gives birth to

after he encountered God in the burning bush; and the seventy-two elders refrained from the same after they received a portion of Moses' spirit. The underlying conviction was not that sexual activity is evil but that it involves us in this world. One should abstain from it when facing the holy presence of God. See Laurentin, *Luc I–II*, 179–89.

¹⁷ Ironically, it is a Protestant exegete, Richard Bauckham, who shows, in response to J. P. Meier's minimalist position, the historical probability that Jesus' brothers and sisters were born from Joseph's first wife. (See "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus: An Epiphanian Response to J. P. Meier," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 [1994]: 686–700.)

¹⁸ "fide concepit"; Augustine, *In Johannis evangelium Tract.* 4:10, *Contra Faustum* 29:4, *Sermo* 65A, 69, 72A.

¹⁹ While Mary's *Fiat* was Mary's free and graced response to God's message.

²⁰ For the foundation of this view in the Gospel text itself, see A. Feuillet, "L'heure de la femme (Jn 16,21) et l'heure de la Mère de Jésus (Jn 19,25–27)," *Biblica* 47 (1966): 169–84, 361–80, 557–73.

the members of the Body of Christ. Thus the Church's activity is analogous to Mary's; more than that, in the Church's prayer Mary and the saints on earth and in heaven are themselves active. This explains why the subject of the Church's official prayer in the Divine Office, and in her sacraments and sacramentals, is not a juridical abstraction, nor is it merely the prayer of Christ alone. Indeed, Christ's grace renders the prayer of Mary and the saints pleasing to the Father and makes it effective; but when we say that "the Church prays," we mean that Mary and the saints pray with Christ. Without Mary's and the saints' prayers,²¹ the Church's motherhood would be just an empty turn of phrase. Of course, the intercessory prayer of Mary and the saints cannot be restricted to the Church's official acts. God's sanctifying actions are not limited to the Church's official acts, and neither is the activity of Mary and the saints.

Just as Mary completed the birth of the Messiah under the cross as she accompanied her Son up to his final "handing over the Spirit" (Jn 19:30), her motherly role for a member of Christ is completed when this member dies and is born to eternal life in heaven. For this reason do we recite in the Hail Mary, "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."²²

People outside the Church often see in her nothing but an ancient institution, one of the oldest forms of "organized religion." Even Catholics have the tendency to reduce the Church's reality to an institution, although they may defend its necessity and usefulness. With such a view in mind, frustrations over the Church's rules and bureaucracy may easily lead some to abandon her.

Our relationship to the Church will most likely change once we discover her all-pervasive Marian dimension. To quote again Cardinal Ratzinger: "In theology it is not the person that is reducible to the thing, but the thing to the person."²³ The scene of the crucified Lord, the Mother of Jesus, and the Beloved Disciple as presented by John 19:25–27, 32–37 reveals to us the personal aspect behind the institutional. The

²¹ I mean here the saints in heaven and on earth, even those members of the Church who are not yet fully purified.

²² From this perspective we begin to appreciate the truth of Ratzinger's and Balthasar's insight: the ecclesiology of the ancient Church is Mariology without the name of Mary. The early Fathers most often spoke of the Church as *ecclesia virgo*, *ecclesia immaculata*, *ecclesia mater* without further explanation. They had an intuition that, in spite of the presence of sinners within the Church, in some real sense one must call the Church an immaculate virgin and mother. Only later could the Church articulate the reason for these terms: it is Mary's immaculate virginal motherhood along with the holiness of the saints that shines through and is active in the Church's virginal motherhood.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Beloved Disciple, John, the friend of Peter, symbolizes all the Apostles, who received from Christ their commission to teach and to lead the faithful to Christ by celebrating the sacraments (the water pouring from Jesus' side signifying baptism, the blood, the Eucharist). But before the Apostle can start his mission, he must welcome the Mother of Jesus "into his own" (*eis ta idia*), which means not merely receiving her into his home, but into all that is his, into his life, heart, and mind. He will live up to his apostolic task only to the extent that he makes Mary's motherly attitude his own. In fact, from St. Paul and St. Ambrose, all the way through St. Bernard and to Blessed John Paul II, all the holy pastors of the Church considered themselves fathers to their people; and yet they also exhibited the tender heart of a mother who remains in travail until all her children are shaped and formed in Christ (cf. Gal 4:19).

This, then, is the twofold challenge for the Church: Her priests and bishops should adopt not only the courage and wisdom of a father in the service of the Gospel, but also the motherly love of Mary, who embraces all human beings.²⁴ Ideally, the laity should be able to perceive—not only through faith but also in personal experience—Mary's motherly care in the ministry of the Church. Of course, it is not very difficult to get disillusioned with any institution. But if we discover behind the institutional aspect of the Church the very person of the crucified and risen Lord as he pours his life into us from his opened side; if we believe that the Church on earth with her sinful members is inseparable from the heavenly Church who is Mary and the saints active in the sacraments and prayer of the earthly church, we will persist in loving her. Our love for her will even grow when we have to face at times the filth and rot that disfigure her here on earth.²⁵

4. The Glorification of Mary's Body in Its Eschatological and Cosmic Significance

Mary is present at the beginning of Jesus' ministry at the marriage feast of Cana; with his "brothers and sisters" she also visits Jesus in the midst

²⁴ The priest's fatherly relationship to his faithful should be modeled upon Joseph's relationship to Jesus. Just as Joseph did not beget Jesus but represented the strength and justice of God the Father for him and loved him more than if Jesus had been his biological son, so should the priest relate to his faithful. He begets them not by himself but by the word of God (cf. 1 Cor 4:15, Phlm 10), and he should guide and love them with a greater love than what he would show to his natural children.

²⁵ Some readers will miss the treatment of the title "Mary, the Mediatrix of All Graces." In my opinion the title "Mary Mother of the Church" contains all that is true and positive in the former. Moreover, "Mary, Mother of the Church" has a strong foundation in Scripture while the title "Mediatrix of All Graces" is more abstract, non-biblical, and prone to serious misunderstandings by Protestants.

of his preaching tours; and she stands at the foot of the Cross on Golgotha. The New Testament, however, does not report any appearance of the risen Jesus to his Mother. Perhaps it took place but, on account of its unofficial, private character, was not recorded. A more probable alternative, however, seems to be that the risen Lord did not actually appear to his Mother; not because Jesus lacked filial piety, but because Mary's faith did not need to be rekindled by such a visible appearance. The faith of all the Apostles was terribly shaken by the ignominious death of their Master, and only multiple encounters with the risen Lord could restore and strengthen their faith. In contrast, Mary seemed never to have lost her deep communion with her Son. At the foot of the Cross, she may have shared in the dying of her Son to such an extent that, on the third day, she could in some initial sense rise with him to a new life. The depth of suffering she shared with the Crucified One assured the depth of her communion with the Risen One. She may have stayed in touch and communicated with him without the empirical evidence of the senses.

Later we find Mary in the midst of the Twelve and the other disciples as they pray in the Upper Room while waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The one whose womb was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit is now praying for the outpouring of the Spirit over the Church. By the first descent of the Spirit, Mary became the Mother of God; by the second, she was empowered to be the Mother of the Church.

Theologians disagree about whether or not Mary died. It is certain, however, that the Virgin Mary had a real death experience: the anguish, the loneliness, and the pain of the sinner's death she felt when sharing in the death of her Son. Moreover, the earliest liturgical feasts of the Virgin indicate that she may have reached the end of her earthly life by a peaceful falling asleep: the Church celebrated from ancient times the "*Dormitio beatae Mariae Virginis*," the "Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin Mary." There are two traditions regarding the place of Mary's death: the Jerusalem tradition holds that she was buried in Gethsemane, but according to another tradition Mary went with John the Apostle to Ephesus, where she died.

Even though there exist only later fourth-to-fifth-century apocryphal writings on Mary's death and the discovery of her empty tomb after the burial, we do not find any sign anywhere of the veneration of her body; no one claims to have found her body. The explicit belief, however, that Mary's body did not see corruption and was taken up to heaven in glory needed several centuries to develop. In particular, it was only after the proclamation of the dogma of her Immaculate Conception, in which it was declared that Mary has never been touched by any corruption of sin, that her bodily Assumption to heaven could be defined.

Pope Pius XII proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption in 1950 in these simple and concise terms: “the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”²⁶ His certain and firm proof was “the universal agreement of the Church’s ordinary Magisterium” which teaches this as a truth that has been revealed by God.²⁷ Pope Pius also quoted the beliefs of several Church Fathers, in particular St. John of Damascus and St. Germanus of Constantinople. Then he continued:

All these proofs and considerations of the holy Fathers and the theologians are based upon the Sacred Writings as their ultimate foundation. These set the loving Mother of God as it were before our very eyes as most intimately joined to her divine Son and as always sharing his lot. Consequently it seems impossible to think of her, the one who conceived Christ, brought him forth, nursed him with her milk, held him in her arms, and clasped him to her breast, as being apart from him in body, even though not in soul, after this earthly life. Since our Redeemer is the Son of Mary, he could not do otherwise, as the perfect observer of God’s law, than to honor, not only his eternal Father, but also his most beloved Mother. And, since it was within his power to grant her this great honor, to preserve her from the corruption of the tomb, we must believe that he really acted in this way. (38)

The significance of the mystery of the Assumption extends far beyond the individual person of Mary inasmuch as it reveals God’s plan for the human body and the material universe. Her glorified body expresses the inner beauty of the Mother of God and of the Church, her fullness of grace resplendent through her body. Being our Mother in the order of grace, Mary will not rest until the bodies of all the redeemed shine with grace. As we contemplate her glory, we have a foretaste of our own final state. Since glorified bodies need a connatural habitat, the Assumption of Mary is also a pledge of the new heaven and new earth at the end of times.

In St. Bernard’s vision, the end of God’s plan includes the union of the “*ima et summa*,” the lowest and the highest creatures, all united with each other and with God. This union is anticipated in Mary’s Assumption:

Today our earth has sent to heaven a precious gift so that, by giving and receiving, in a happy bond of friendship, human realities be joined to divine realities, earthly things to heavenly things, the lowest to the highest.²⁸

²⁶ *Munificentissimus Deus*, 44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁸ *Sermo in Assumptione* 1:2. Beginning with Karl Rahner, recent theologians speculated that Mary was not the only one who was glorified both body and soul,

5. The Anthropological Implications of the Mystery of Mary

Some women have felt deeply hurt by the papal Magisterium's strong stand against the possibility of ordaining women to holy orders. In the long run, however, the Church's position will prove prophetic: against the cultural mainstream she affirms and protects the anthropological and theological significance of the complementarity of human gender. The decisive reason why the Church is unable to ordain women is apostolic tradition, but the different representational significance of each gender makes this tradition intelligible. The ministerial priest represents Christ, the head of the Church, the eternal Son made man, who sows the Word of God into our hearts and, through the Holy Spirit, initiates divine life on earth. The man, then, whose gender is best expressed in this world by his procreative initiative and his headship of the family through service, is metaphysically fit to represent the Second Person of the Trinity in His relationship to the Church.²⁹ At the same time, men can only imperfectly represent the very essence of the Church, her virginal motherhood. It is the woman who receives her human nature in such a way that it reflects the fundamental relationship of the Church to Christ, which is the role of virginal bride and mother. In conceiving, a woman needs a man's initiative, but she gives of herself and nourishes the new life with herself until the birth, and even afterward. Her role expresses on the human level the entire Church's mission to communicate Christ's life to her members and to nourish it until their last breath on earth. Man's complementary role to woman, on the other hand, represents the Church's need for the divine initiative, namely the reception of divine life from Christ. This permanent dependence of the Church on the sanctifying action of Christ is signified by the male ministerial priesthood.

Thus, in spite of the correspondence between natural and supernatural gender roles, in the life of grace we also notice a remarkable role change. The Church as Woman is a *partner to Christ*; in contrast, her male hierarchy expresses the *Church's dependence on Christ*. She is a relatively

but (relying on Matthew 27:51–53) that other saints, in fact all the saved, are raised up with an eschatological body at the very moment of their death. We cannot discuss here the question of the nature of time beyond this world. What is at any rate clear is that the glorification of the bodies of Jesus and Mary must have been different from that of any other human being. Jesus and Mary were completely sinless, without even original sin, therefore their bodies did not decay like anybody else's, but were simply transformed into spirit-filled, incorruptible, and immortal bodies.

²⁹ The implicit presupposition in this argument of complementary representational difference is that the human being is a psychosomatic unity: therefore, the biological difference influences the personality of each sex.

independent partner to God insofar as she is analogously Mary, virginal bride and mother. God the Son loves his Bride, delights in her, and accepts to be born from her continuously in every living member of his Church. Thus, the Church as mother actively cooperates in the salvation of her members, even though her activity results from the gift of Christ in the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, it is the Church, virgin, bride and mother, who prays in the liturgical prayers (of course, with the support of Christ, who never abandons his bride) and who offers her love and suffering for all human beings. In every sacramental celebration, on the other hand, the ordained minister is not so much a partner to, but a slave of, Christ, whom the minister's action represents and behind whom the minister should efface himself. This instrumental role explains why even a priest in the state of grave sin can validly (but not licitly) celebrate the sacraments. If the priest, however, wants to celebrate the sacraments not just validly but worthily, he should personally appropriate the prayer of the Marian Church, virgin and mother. Just as the Apostle John took Mary into his own heart and life, every priest should make his own the motherly heart of Mary.

6. Mary and the Autonomy of Creation

An ecclesiology that does not provide an adequate place for Mary is likely to lead to one of two distortions. It may result in reducing the Church to a sociological notion such as a mere congregation of believers, or it may jeopardize her autonomous reality vis-à-vis Christ. The juridical definitions of the Catholic Church after Trent, as well as the predominantly "people of God" ecclesiologies of the post-Vatican II period, both differ from the Lutheran Confession of Augsburg only with regard to the role of apostolic authority. Otherwise, both suffer from the same type of inadequacy inasmuch as their emphasis is one-sidedly on the visible, sociological aspects of the Church.

If, however, we emphasize exclusively the mystical aspect of the Church as "the Body of Christ," we construct another distorted notion of the Church by forgetting that the Church is an autonomous subject in loving surrender to Christ as her Bridegroom. As Ratzinger points out, this approach can easily slip into a "*solus Christus*" or "Christomonist" presentation in which all that is supernatural and holy in the Church must be attributed to Christ alone. In this view the Church as such has no distinct existence of her own, since all that she is is Christ present among us. The human element in the Church is either swallowed up in Christ or remains sinful and passive.

As we have seen, Mary, on the other hand, appears as autonomous “partner,” mother, and virginal spouse for the risen Christ, a convincing sign that God finds his joy and glory in elevating the creature to himself in such a way that his love bridges the infinite gap between Creator and creature. What St. Bernard says about the Church as Bride is eminently applicable to Mary: “When God loves, He wants nothing else but to be loved. For He has no other purpose in loving than to be loved in return, knowing that this very love makes happy those who love Him.”³⁰

God’s love is so humble and all-powerful that, according to St. Bernard, in a certain sense he elevates Mary even above himself as his own Mother.³¹ Of course, ontologically Mary remains a creature, totally dependent on God, and thus she is nothing in herself apart from God. Yet God’s gifts are truly hers and therefore she is full of grace and fully beautiful. Taken up body and soul into heaven, Mary is the most perfect realization and guarantee of what redeemed humankind will look like at the end of history. As our mother, she is most anxious to share her immaculate purity and the splendor of her glorified humanity with all her children. In the words of Ratzinger:

Mariology demonstrates that the doctrine of grace does not revoke creation; rather, it is the definitive Yes to creation. In this way, Mariology guarantees the ontological independence [*Eigenständigkeit*] of creation, undergirds faith in creation, and crowns the doctrine of creation, rightly understood. Questions and tasks await us here that have scarcely begun to be treated or undertaken.³²

7. Mary and the Holy Spirit

In post-Tridentine theology, pneumatology remained substantially underdeveloped. To some extent, then, the role of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification tended to be replaced by the role of Mary. For instance, it was said that Mary shapes the image of Christ in us; she is our advocate; we come to Jesus through Mary; and Mary intercedes for us. In biblical

³⁰ *Sermones super Cantica* 83,4: II, 301. While Bernard is very faithful to the patristic tradition that does not call Mary the *sponsa immaculata*, he attributes the features of Mary to the Church as spouse. Cf. “*plena confessio gratiae, ipsius gratiae plenitudinem signat in anima confitentis*: The full praise of grace expresses the fullness of grace in the soul of the one who praises [it].” *Sermones super Cantica* 67:10.

³¹ “Admire then both mysteries and choose which one you admire more, the most gracious favor of the Son or the highest dignity of the Mother. Both are stunning miracles. That God would submit to a woman, is unprecedented humility. That a woman rule over God, is unparalleled dignity” (St. Bernard, *Homilia Super Missus Est* 1,7: IV, 19).

³² Ratzinger, “Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine . . .,” 31.

and patristic spirituality, however, it is the Holy Spirit who forms Christ in us, the Holy Spirit who is our advocate, the Holy Spirit through whom we come to Christ, and the Holy Spirit who prays in us to the Father and the Son. The two sets of statements, however, do not necessarily exclude each other if they are more precisely articulated. All that directly refers to the divine action of calling into being what has not existed beforehand, such as the “new creation,” the forgiveness of sins, the formation of the features of Jesus Christ in us, the supernatural life of faith, hope, and charity—cannot come from any creature, but only from the Holy Spirit himself. He is the “*dextrae Dei digitus*,” the finger of God’s right hand, which carves out in us the image of the Son. He intercedes for us with “inexpressible groanings” (Rom 8:26). We have faith and hope because the Spirit dwells in us, and we love God and neighbor with the very love of the Holy Spirit.

Mary’s role is situated on a different plane. She has been given a universal mission to be the Mother of all actual and potential believers. Her activity, however, consists in watching over us, talking to us, and praying for us. The Holy Spirit descended upon her at Pentecost precisely for this reason, to fulfill her mission as the Mother of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who enables her to watch over us, to comfort us, and to guide us. Mary thus shapes and forms Christ in us only by the power of the Spirit, who always responds to her requests. Mary’s prayer is almighty because the Holy Spirit intercedes in her. God’s humility and condescension infinitely exceed our imagination: the Holy Spirit finds his delight “in doing great things” for Mary, equipping her superabundantly so that she can fulfill her vocation as universal Mother.

8. A Christocentric Marian Spirituality

“From that hour the disciple received her into his own.”

A real danger for Marian spirituality is to move Mary into the center of one’s piety. Even if on the conceptual level we do not inflate Mary into a demigoddess, we may so treat her in our prayer life and thus marginalize the Triune God. This would clearly contrast with what Mary does according to the Gospels and what the authentic Tradition of the Church holds. “Do whatever He tells you,” said Mary to the attendants at the wedding feast of Cana, and she repeats these same words to everyone who turns to her in need. Marian piety should be deep and intense but christocentric and theocentric, just like Mary’s piety. We can find the secret of such an attitude in the scene described in John 19:25–27: Jesus tells his Mother, “Woman, behold your son,” and to the Beloved Disci-

ple, who represents under the Cross all believers, he says, "Behold your mother." And the Evangelist adds: "And from that hour the disciple received Mary into his own." As we said before, the phrase "*eis ta idia*" does not simply mean "into his home," but includes "into his life" and "into his heart." If we truly receive Mary into our life and heart, our holy communions will change because we will ask Mary to help us receive and identify with her Son. Mary gave birth to God's Son in both flesh and spirit. We can do so only in the spirit—that is, we can shrink our ego in order to provide space for Jesus within us. Let him "increase" while we "decrease," so that more and more he can speak, act, and feel through us. In this way Mary does not diminish the centrality of Christ but rather helps us to be united with him. Nor does the role of Mary eclipse the Holy Spirit: Mary's motherly role, her helping Christ to be born in us, would be impossible without the fullness of the Holy Spirit in Mary.

The image of giving birth to Jesus within us calls for some further explanation. It obviously means a spiritual birth, yet a birth which does not affect exclusively the soul. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, Mary takes both our soul and flesh—our concrete, individual humanity—and molds it by the power of her prayer into the expression of Jesus' presence in the world; but she can only do so to the extent that our free cooperation allows her. This way of Mary's presence, however, will not eliminate our "I" or our personality, but—to varying degrees—our "I" and our personality will be transformed into expressions of Christ's love and activity. As long as we are pilgrims on earth, this birth of Christ in us—which is the same, from another viewpoint, as our rebirth to a new life in God—is just a beginning and is certainly incomplete. The glory of Christ will shine through us without the admixture of sin and imperfection only in heaven, where Christ will be all in all in his creation.

These considerations show us that the "Marian dimension" of the Church means not only that Mary is the perfect realization of the eschatological Church. She is not an abstract image, but that irreplaceable, concrete person, the Mother of Jesus, and of the Church who is active in bringing to birth Christ in every member of the Church on earth.

Devotion to Mary and Human Maturity

Not only ancient Chinese wisdom and Carl Jung's depth psychology, but also common sense wisdom throughout the ages knows what qualities a mature woman or man possesses. The mature woman is not only intuitive, sensitive, affectionate, and empathetic—the usual female qualities we appreciate—but also strong, objective, courageous, and possessing a spine of steel. In like manner, the mature male is not simply the cool, detached,

and valiant warrior, but also someone who is affectionate, compassionate, warm, and personable. In Jungian terms, full humanness for the woman requires that she actualize her subconscious male archetype; for the man, that he integrate his subconscious female archetype. This does not mean an androgynous personality in the sense that the qualities of both genders would exist in a neutralizing balance in both sexes. The male in this process becomes a mature man, the female a mature woman, each with his/her own fully developed psychological identity.

My purpose is to show how a healthy Marian piety helps both sexes in the maturation to full humanity. The man who receives Mary into his life and heart will allow Jesus to be born in him and will help others to give birth to Jesus in their hearts. The awareness of such a motherly task as giving birth will actualize what Jung calls the "*anima*" in the man, the latent female archetype, and he will integrate it in a complementary way to his manhood. The woman who receives Mary into her life and heart will also give birth to Jesus and help others to do the same. But by growing to the extent of the full stature of Christ, she will also attain "to mature manhood" (Eph 4:13) in the sense of integrating her male archetype, Jung's "*animus*," into her female personality. This process of men and women actualizing their full humanity is part of that "hundredfold," the earthly reward for following Christ.

Conclusions

One of the reasons often employed to justify the omission or reduction of Mariology in theology programs is the appeal to the famous statement about the "hierarchy of truths" from Vatican II. We should indeed keep in mind in ecumenical discussions that "in Catholic doctrine there exists a 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith."³³ Yet, in every building there are structural elements that seem insignificant but without which the building would lose its beauty, become uninhabitable, and even collapse. So it is with our Catholic Faith. As we have seen, many of its central truths, such as the Incarnation, Redemption, the reality of the Church and of the Eucharistic sacrifice, would change substantially or even collapse if we removed or distorted the mystery of Mary.

To sum up briefly the most important points: without Mary, the Son of God could not have become a true human being; without Mary's Immaculate Conception, God's redemptive work for humankind would

³³ "When comparing doctrines with one another, [theologians] should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists a 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 11).

not have fully succeeded, because no one would have received with perfect freedom the fullness of the Son's gift of redemption, no one in the Church would have fully appropriated the Son's sacrifice, and no one would have become the fully beautiful spouse of the Word made flesh.

As it is, the goal of salvation history is the creation of this beautiful Bride and Mother, fully realized in Mary, whose grace and beauty the Holy Spirit diffuses through all saved humankind. Mary is our Mother, and she will find no rest until all the elect, her children, share in her treasures, each according to his own capacity. The eschatological Woman then—that is, Mary and all the saints—reveals what is most divine in God: his infinite humility and gratuitous love. Through his love and humility God elevates creation from nothingness to the status of a worthy partner for himself as Bride and even accepts dependence on her as his own Mother; in Mary, he does so both according to the spirit and according to the flesh, and in the Church according to the spirit. The Woman remains a creature, but by God's grace she is endowed with such beauty that God himself finds in her his joy and delight. **N.V**