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# Mary, Mother of the Church

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## MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

Mary is intelligible only in terms of Christ. No responsible theologian questions this. Yet a total theology of Christ cannot be written without some reference to Mary. Mary furthermore, is intelligible only in terms of the Church. Yet a total theology of the Church cannot be written without some reference to Mary. This is not to say that Mary's relationship with Christ and with the Church is the same. For Christ is the sole principle ultimately responsible not only for Mary and the Church but for their relationship with each other and with Him as well. The mystery of Christ creates the mystery of Mary and the mystery of the Church. And Christ has involved Mary and the Church in a relationship with each other so subtle and so strong that one never quite captures all the differences and all the similarities between them. Mary and the Church serve the mystery of Christ. They do this together but differently. Every Christian's love for Christ, Mary's most of all, includes a love for Christ's Church and Christ's disciples. Conversely, every Christian's love for Christ, the Church's most of all, includes a love for that woman in salvation who conceived, brought to birth, educated, and shared the life of Christ.

The task assigned us in this paper is not an easy one. Yet it is a task no theologian can fully ignore. On November 21, 1964, while concluding the third session of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI declared Mary, "Mother of the Church." Since this was an act of the official teaching Church, a theologian must explain it or at least understand it. One can object as much as he chooses to this or that aspect of the declaration (we shall speak of these objections later), but objections which insist that the Holy Father should not have declared the title or should have declared it differently are academic at this point.

Everyone knows the history of how chapter eight of the *Con-*

*stitution on the Church* was written. Everyone knows, or can easily learn, of the eagerness Pope Paul expressed frequently to declare Mary Mother of the Church. In his presidential address of last year, Monsignor George W. Shea outlined for us the various procedures which led the Council from a decision to include a mariological statement in the *Constitution on the Church* (October 29, 1963) to the eventual papal declaration of the title (November 21, 1964). He traced for us, in greater detail, the number of times Paul VI spoke of his desire to declare Mary Mother of the Church before the actual declaration itself. We know also of earlier references to the title during the pontificates of Benedict XIV, Leo XIII, and John XXIII.<sup>1</sup>

In exploring the theology of the "Mother of the Church" title, I shall proceed from oblique theological references to a direct consideration of the point at issue. In doing this, I shall consider four questions.

1. Mary, Disciple of the Lord and Mother of the Lord
2. Mary, Mother of the Disciples of the Lord
3. Mary, Type of the Church
4. Mary, Mother of the Church.

### 1. *Mary, Disciple of the Lord and Mother of the Lord*

We must, first of all, state quite clearly and unequivocally that Mary is a disciple of the Lord. That she is more than this does not undo the fact that she is this.

<sup>1</sup> In his bull *Gloriosae Dominae* (Sept 27, 1748) Benedict XIV states: "The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved Mother." Leo XIII's encyclical *Admirabilem populis* (Sept 5, 1895) speaks of Mary as "most truly Mother of the Church" (*verissime quidem mater Ecclesiae*). John XXIII used the title "Mother of the Church" or its equivalent "Mother of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church," at least five times. Cf. J. Galot, *Mère de l'Église*, in *NRT* 86 (1964) 1163-1184. G. M. Roschini, in the article *Mother of the Church*, in *Our Lady's Digest*, 19 (March-April, 1965) 270-277, collects many references to this title from liturgical, partristic and papal sources.

The discipleship of Mary is due to two factors: her human personality and her redeemed status.

Humanly, Mary, as we, emerges from nothingness. Everything that is not God, Mary included, is the work of His almighty Will and is never more than a faint expression of His eternal Being. Mary is fully involved in what we might call the human situation. She is exposed, as the Church will be later, to the incalculable and irrational elements inseparable from the present human condition. She must face the harsh realities of life: birth and death, misunderstanding and contradiction, daily toil and anxiety. She, too, must suffer all the sinless consequences of mankind's sinful beginnings. She, too, must forfeit, as a creature living after Adam's refusal, the lost vocation of the first Adam. She finds herself at times confronted by the hopeless social situations which the Church will later grieve over and which frustrate all of us. She is for herself, as every human creature must be, a mystery never fully grasped. Twice in the Scriptures it is said of her that she did not understand (*Luke* 2:33 and 2:50). She had to learn about her Child slowly, keeping very much in her heart. As with the Church later, she will possess implicitly more mystery and richness than she ever explicitly formulates. Mary had to live, as we must and as the Church does every day, the severe ordeal of faith.

Mary, however, lives, as we know, not only within the restrictions of human existence, but by virtue of grace and redemption. She is not only a creature, but a creature of splendid and superlative holiness. She is sinless, free as no other Christian has ever been free, sensitive to Christ with a responsiveness beyond compare. She is the finest expression of the *anawim* theme of the Old Testament. She is the poor one of Yahweh, and like the poor of the Old Testament she trusts in God unflinchingly and is astonished when she is called "filled with grace" and "blessed." Pope Paul has reminded us:

Christ is the sole mediator, the sole source of grace. Whatever Mary has, she owes to Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, sanctity for Mary as for us is redemption. She is no less redeemed because she is ever sinless. Preservation from sin is a more radiant redemption than grace given after sin, but it is still redemption. The fact that Mary is free from sin cannot, as with Christ, be due to herself. Here sinless status depends, as is not the case with Christ, on a principle outside of herself.

We call Mary then a disciple of the Lord because she is so totally human and so clearly redeemed. Mary is not only disciple but she is also a disciple without a ministerial function in the Church. She occupies no apostolic office in the community of Christ. No apostle will ever rule by virtue of a commission from Mary. No sacrament nor any liturgical celebration will ever be performed in her name. Hence the Church insists that we never call Mary a priest or an apostle. Her relationship with the Church is of a different order.

Mary is a member of the Church, as Augustine reminds us:

Mary is holy, Mary is blessed, but the Church is more impressive than the Virgin Mary. Why? Because Mary is a part of the Church, a holy member, an excellent member, a superlative member, but yet a member of the Body.<sup>3</sup>

Pope Paul reminds us of the same fact as he declares Mary Mother of the Church. She is a "daughter of Adam," "our sister through ties of nature," and "the perfect image of the disciple of Christ."

Though all we have said of Mary thus far is undeniably true, we have not yet expressed the Church's full understanding of her. To call Mary only a disciple of the Lord is to neglect the

<sup>2</sup> Paul VI, discourse at Castelgandolfo, Aug 15, 1964; cf. *OR*, Aug 17-18, 1964

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine, *Serm. Denis*, 25, 7; ed G. Morin, in *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, 163.

fact that Scripture calls her the Mother of Jesus and the faith of the Church calls her Mother of God. Mary, then, is not only disciple but also the Mother of the Lord. Hence, different things must be said of her from those things we say of one who is only disciple.

The Word was made flesh, we know, because a maiden of our race heard God speak in the freedom of her heart and because she gave God a total, sinless, unconditional gift of herself. She became the Mother of the Lord not only because Christ was physically born of her, but because she agreed to this in courage and by her consent. Her maternity was not only a biological happening, but included a spiritual commitment to her Son and His mission. Luke makes it clear that nothing is to occur unless Mary agrees. God, in that mystery by which He creates a human person, gave Mary a freedom which was truly her own. With God's grace and her sinless use of her own freedom, Mary speaks her acceptance. Physically, Christian history will now call her Mother of the Lord. Spiritually, Christian history will now see in her an example of devoted discipleship. Spiritually, she is not the Mother of the Lord. Yet neither is she the Mother of the Lord only because she brings her Son to physical birth. Her discipleship enters into her function of physical maternity. These principles will be clarified further on in this paper.

## *2 Mary, Mother of the Disciples of the Lord*

There has been a conviction in the Church for centuries that Mary in her consent at the Annunciation and in her compassion on Calvary achieved not only a unity with Christ but a certain relationship with us. Since Mary exercised a maternal function on behalf of Christ, somehow that same function is exercised on behalf of us, the members of her Son's Body. We have seen that Mary is the Mother of Christ. This is fundamentally, but not exclusively, a corporeal relationship. Mary is also, in Catholic thought, the mother of the members of Christ's Mystical Body. This is an exclusively spiritual relationship.

What we have just said is not a recent development in theology. It dates from the patristic age of the Church.

Origen once wrote:

None is Mary's son but Jesus alone; and when Jesus says to his mother "Behold your son," it is as if he said "Behold this man is Jesus himself, to whom you gave birth." For everyone who has received the fulness that is baptism, lives now no more himself, but Christ lives in him. And since Christ lives in him, the word of Mary applies to him—"Behold your son—the anointed Christ."<sup>4</sup>

Augustine recognizes this same role of Mary:

Mary is indeed the mother of Christ's members, that is, of ourselves. For it is by her work of love that men have been born in the Church, faithful men who are the Body of the Head, whose mother she was in the flesh.<sup>5</sup>

Gerhoh of Reichersberg explains Mary's relationship with all who follow Christ in much the same way as Origen had done:

"Behold your mother" . . . What was said to one, to John who so loved him and whom Christ loved more than all the others, can be applied to all who love Him.<sup>6</sup>

It was a realization of evidence such as this which led Leo XIII to write:

It has always been the Church's interpretation that Christ indicated in the person of John the human race, and in particular those who would be faithful to Him.<sup>7</sup>

Even if one chooses to interpret differently the scriptural passages cited by the Fathers, one must recognize something more significant than biblical exegesis here. The traditional exegesis of the words to Mary and John is plausible and generally accepted. What interests a dogmatic theologian, however, is not

<sup>4</sup> Origen, *Comment in Joan.*; PG 14, 32.

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 6; PL 14, 399

<sup>6</sup> Gerhoh of Reichersberg, *Liber de gloria Filii hominis*, 10, PL 194, 1105.

<sup>7</sup> Leo XIII, *Adjuvicem populi* (Sept. 5, 1895).

always whether or not a passage is accurately exegeted, but what the consciousness of the Church is trying to express in the exegesis which is given. There is not always a logical and coherent line back to the scriptural foundation for a doctrine of the Church. Frequently enough, the Church is in existential possession of some truth long before she is notionally aware of its explicitation. This is not to say that ignorance of accurate biblical exegesis is permissible. It is not to say that precise scriptural interpretation is not imperative. This would be foolish. We intend only to say that frequently in the faith of the Church more is at issue than the letter of the Scriptures. The Church must never become un-biblical. Nor must the Church ever become fundamentalistic in its use of the Bible.

The Church professes that the faith and love of Mary is a factor not only bringing Christ to corporeal birth but also influencing all who believe in Christ. The physical Christ is the focal point of all Christian experience and the principle ultimately responsible for the birth of all His mystical members. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, has a maternal and perfect disciple-relationship with the physical Christ through whom all things Christian come to be. Hence, her influence over us is inescapable.

Mary stands with us before the Lord as He beholds the human family. All the redeemed are part of each other's sanctification in that mystery we call the communion of saints. All of us are intermediaries for each other. Each of us is freed from his own isolation to share in the glory of all and to offer himself for all. The redemption of each Christian is always a grace and blessing for the other. As we all stand before the Lord, redeemed, only one of our number can see in the Lord her own Son. Only one of our number is saved and redeemed through and through, perfectly. Hence we look to one of our number to lead us in the way of the Lord.

No one of us receives redemption passively. We all receive redemption receptively and freely. This means that our free response is essential and irreplaceable. It means that our re-



sponse costs us something and is worthwhile. Only one of the redeemed gives a perfect response. Her perfect response is influential in the imperfect response each of us must give. This must be so. If our imperfect responses to God influence each other, how much more influential is that one response which is perfect, forever sinless, and contributive to the birth of the physical Christ?

Mary is the mother of the disciples of the Lord because she belongs to Christ utterly and without restraint. She belongs to His life and His work, His Church, and His grace the way no one else does. She is also mother of the disciples of the Lord because she belongs to us so inseparably in the communion of the saints. The more one loves Christ, the more he belongs to the brethren of the Lord. Mary, in loving Christ perfectly, loved us in a way we have never learned to love each other.

### 3. *Mary, Type of the Church*

Contemporary theology makes much of the Mary-Church relationship. The Middle Ages manifested an interest in personal devotion to Mary and her nearness to Christ. Today, without denying the validity of previous interpretations of Mary, there is a greater emphasis on an ecclesial approach to Mary and her solidarity with us.

The christological line uniting Mary and the Church to Christ is strong, clear, and without ecumenical complication. It is not difficult for all Christians to see that both Mary and the Church are created by the redemption of Christ. The ecclesiological line uniting Mary and the Church to each other and to Christ is more subtle and ecumenically problematic.

Catholic theology sees both Mary and the Church as means by which we are saved. Classic Reformation theology does not accept this. For Catholic theology, the Church is not only the *place* where God and man meet, but an instrument in this encounter. Mary is not only the *place* where God and man harmonized in Christ, but an instrument in our meeting with Christ.

Sacraments are not only the *situations* in which God and man meet, but they are objective means of grace and enter into one's subjective sanctification. Justification in Catholic thought is essentially and primarily from Christ. Yet it has also an ecclesial, marian, and sacramental dimension. This is not to say that any other is Mediator in place of Christ. Church, Mary, and sacrament depend totally upon Christ for their significance. What we have said above, however, is an affirmation of the communitarian dimension of justification. Church, Mary and sacrament are not only essentially relative to Christ. They are also unmistakably communitarian. Church, Mary and sacred sign are not pure symbol or occasions of grace, but genuine sacrament and means of sanctification. The sacrament of God is Christ. The sacrament of Christ is the Church. The sacrament of the Church are its sacred signs. But Mary also represents the Church in a sensible and visible manner. God is given to us in grace through Christ, Church, Mary and sacrament, though not in the same way.

Although Mary is type of the Church, Mary and the Church are not identical. They are intimately joined. There are no clear lines separating Mary from the Church or the Church from Mary. Yet there are unmistakable differences.

Mary, for example, is a person while the Church is a community. Mary, however, is a person *in* the Church. She has no religious significance outside the Church. The Church, conversely, never is fully conscious of itself in abstraction from the Word's incarnation from Mary. Mary is an individual, but as an individual she is what the collective Church seeks to become.

The Church, furthermore, is a community of grace in hierarchy and sacrament. It brings us the mystery of the Event of Christ in preaching and sacred sign. Mary, however, has no ministerial or liturgical function in the community. Peter, not Mary, is prince of the apostolic college. Christ, not Mary, is symbolized and encountered in the liturgy. Mary's participation

in the Event of Christ is historical, not kerygmatic or sacramental.

Mary, finally, is sinless in her response to Christ. The Church quite evidently is not.

When the Fathers spoke of the Mary-Church relationship, they referred frequently to the maternity and virginity which both Mary and the Church exercise. In physical maternity, Mary becomes Mother of Christ. In spiritual maternity, the Church makes us children of the Father. Mary and the Church are, furthermore, both virginal. Each is essentially holy. Each is indefectible in its essential allegiance to Christ. Because the grace of God reaches the very roots of Mary and the Church, the virginity of each is fruitful in life and productive of Christ. The spiritual energy of Christ influences and vivifies both the Church and Mary. No other influence gives life to either.

This relationship between Mary and the Church was early noticed by Ephrem the Syrian:

Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son a hidden mystery of the Church<sup>8</sup>

Cyril of Alexandria saw the same relationship:

... let us praise with songs of joy Mary ever virgin who herself is clearly the holy Church, together with her Son...<sup>9</sup>

Further patristic references might better await the next section of this paper.

As the Church is a pledge of victory over the serpent and death, so is Mary. She overcomes the serpent in her Immaculate Conception, and death in her Assumption. These two prerogatives of Mary are deeply laden with ecclesiological mystery and typology. The Church is typified by one who is sinless since the Church itself is, in essence, sinless. This is why we confess the

<sup>8</sup> St. Ephrem, *Hymn Five, On the Birth of the Lord in the Flesh*, v. 5; ed. Lamy, 2, 486, quoted by H. Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church* (New York, 1963) 9.

<sup>9</sup> Cyril of Alexandria; PG 77, 996.

Church as holy in our creed. Sin is, of course, a reality in the Church, but it is a reality which contradicts the Church's essence. Sin is, however, no reality in Mary. She is wholly fair, wholly without sin. And her holiness is a revelation to the Church of its own fundamental essence. Mary without sin is, moreover, a promise to the Church of what the Church of glory shall be. Mary, in her Immaculate Conception, is a sign of what the Church is in essence now and of what the Church will be in its every member hereafter.

The Assumption of Mary into heaven tells us that this dear and familiar daughter of our race has been taken up, unimpaired and transformed, into the eternal life of God Himself. The Assumption of Mary emphasizes the visible triumph of her sanctity. Her visible transfiguration reminds us of the importance of the Church's visible structure. It also tells us that the Church's very visibility will be glorified in the resurrection of the flesh. Mary's holy body lights the way for the Body of the Church, and reminds the Church that her every member will be saved through and through, in body and spirit. The Body of the Church, like the body of Mary, will be called from the darkness of this night into the wonderful light of God.

Like the Church, Mary makes Christ's work her own and shares it. Like the Church, Mary is perpetually in prayer before the Father. She is holy and type of the Church because she realizes the very essence of the Church in her personal existence.

#### 4. *Mary, Mother of the Church*

All that we have said in the previous sections of this paper have a relationship with this final point. Our consideration of Mary has proceeded systematically from those things which are easier to understand to the more complex. Mary is easiest to understand as a disciple of the Lord. Things become more difficult as one calls her Mother of the Lord, Mother of the disciples of the Lord, and type of the Church. Yet if one does not say each and every one of these things, he does not under-

stand the title "Mother of the Church." When Pope Paul declared this new title, he commented that it "sums up in an admirable synthesis the privileged position recognized by the Council for the Virgin in the holy Church "

Patristic references to Mary as Mother of the Church are not always direct, but they are frequent.

St. Ambrose writes of Mary's visit to Elizabeth:

"How lovely your sandalled steps, a princely maid " Yes, princely and lovely indeed are the Church's steps as she goes to announce her Gospel of joy lovely the steps of Mary and the Church <sup>10</sup>

Augustine reminds us that "the virginity which Christ desires in the heart of the Church, he assured first in the body of Mary."<sup>11</sup> Augustine, in another sermon, draws out once more the priority of Mary to the Church. "Now," he writes, "there will be born of an immaculate virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the one from whom will then be born, by the same Holy Spirit, the immaculate Church."<sup>12</sup>

Later, we find a reference in pseudo-Ambrose to Mary in a commentary on the Apocalypse.

We can indeed say that the Woman of the Apocalypse is Mary, because she is the Mother of the Church, having given birth to the Head of the Church Yet she is also the daughter of the Church, and the holiest of her members.<sup>12a</sup>

The Fathers speak as they do because Scripture and Tradition had given them an image of Mary which Pope Paul will later express in the title "Mother of the Church " There are already in the Gospels some indications of Mary's priority over the Church. It may be well to consider these in passing before explaining the theological foundation for the title.

<sup>10</sup>St. Ambrose, *De inst virg.*, 14, 87; PL 16, 326.

<sup>11</sup>St Augustine, *Serm.* 178, 4, PL 38, 1005

<sup>12</sup>St Augustine, *Serm.* 225, 4; PL 38, 1074

<sup>12a</sup>Ps -Ambrose [= Berengaud], *Comment. in Apoc* 4, 3, 4. PL 17, 876.

Luke, first in his Gospel, later in the Acts, gives us an indication of the Spirit's influence over Mary. In the Annunciation, the Holy Spirit overshadows Mary as an image of the Church to be. Mary is, in a sense, already a Church in embryo, someone who receives Christ and depends upon Him. As a Church before the Church, Mary makes the first act of faith in the Messiah. In doing this, she sums up the faith of Israel. As a daughter of Zion she makes the first Christian act of faith. No act of faith in Israel before hers led to the incarnation of God. No act of faith after hers in Christian history will lead again to the Word's taking on flesh. The internal law which governs the maternity she freely accepts is the establishment of that messianic kingdom of which the angelic messenger speaks. The maternity of Mary then is directed to Christ and to the kingdom over which He shall reign as royal Messiah. Later at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit overshadows the disciples to constitute the Church. While Mary is in the midst of the Twelve, the Spirit brings to the community a reality which was begun already in the virgin Mary: the power to bear Christ's life within itself.

At Cana, Mary, once again in the midst of the disciples, makes a confident act of faith in her Son's messianic power. She makes a request that the light of Christ which she bore in her body and heart from the Annunciation be made now to shine upon all men. Although His "hour has not yet come," Christ works at Cana in the land of Galilee "the first of the signs by which Jesus revealed his glory and led his disciples to believe in him." The disciples believe because Mary's faith and Christ's power lead to the first of His signs. In a sense, she shows herself here to be a mother of the faith of the disciples. After this, the entire company follow Jesus in faith: "his mother, his brothers, and his disciples."

At Calvary, once again Mary and the Church are shown in close relationship with each other. Once again, Mary precedes the Church as she does in the Annunciation and at Cana. Beneath the cross, the Church is symbolized by Mary and by the

beloved disciple Mary is told, in this most solemn messianic moment, that she must see her son now in John. She is to be mother of the faithful represented by the faithful disciple. As the Lord dies, He looks upon Mary and the Church, the fairest works of His ministry, and He calls them into a new relationship with each other. "Mother, your son; son, your mother." Mary and John beneath the cross are the faithful remnant of the messianic community Christ called to be with Him always. Mary's maternity and grief becomes now part of the mystery of the Church as they were once part of the mystery of Christ. Mary sees her only Son die. And as she sees all her hope die, she is told to give herself fully to her new son. John is the disciple near Christ and Mary. He is beloved because he is faithful even unto death. Thus he is a symbol of all undying discipleship in Christ. He is the sign of the Church that Mary now sees in an utterly new way. Were it not for Christ, Mary and John would neither be nor belong to each other. Because of Christ, Mary and John see in each other mother and son.

Mary, who so clearly anticipates the Church even as she represents it, is made on Calvary to surpass the Church. Christ makes use of her fulness to sanctify the Church. She becomes at this moment mother of the Christian community.

Mary, therefore, in Scripture and Tradition and in her new title is portrayed as one having a maternal influence over the generation, formation, and existence of the Church. Mary is not, however, as Pope Paul insists, mother of the hierarchical, liturgical, sacramental, visible Church. Her maternal influence over the community is in terms of faith, grace, and mystic union with Christ. She is mother more accurately of the invisible Church (though this implies an oblique reference to visible structure). She is Mother of the Church, Pope Paul tells us, insofar as she is mother of the faithful, of the People of God, of the Christian people.

It is not theologically accurate, then, to see Mary's influence under this title only in terms of her relationship with individual

Christians She contributes rather to the very unifying of the faithful into community. This is why it is not enough to call her only Mother of the Faithful. As one thinks of it, this is how things must be. If she influences our faith and grace, she must influence our coming together, since faith and grace are communitarian and ecclesial. If furthermore she influences our faith and grace, she has some reference to the visible Church, since faith and grace are incarnationally oriented. She is not, however, responsible for apostolic prerogative nor sacramental efficacy in the Church

To say Mary is Mother of the Church is not to say she is the principal source of the Church. Mary is not the principal source of anything supernatural. To say that Mary is Mother of the Church is not to say she exercises a maternal responsibility over the entire existence of the Church. Even the metaphor does not demand this. No mother is responsible *totally* for the existence of her child.

What the Church is trying to say in this title is that Mary's calling is of a higher order than that of the Church. It is trying to say also that, in a sense, the Church depends upon Mary, as Christ, in a sense, depended upon Mary. Mary is the Mother of God who became the spiritual mother of men. She is the Mother of Christ who becomes the mother of Christians. She is the Mother of the Church who becomes the mother of the community called together by Christ. The ecclesial and communitarian dimensions of Mary's influence over the faithful are more clearly emphasized in this title than in any other. Her role in Christian unity is intimated in this title. As Augustine once wrote:

Mary gave birth to the One, and the Church gives birth to the many, who through the One are one<sup>13</sup>

Some solution to the antinomy expressed by our calling Mary both member and mother of the Church can now be achieved.

<sup>13</sup> St. Augustine, *Serm.* 195, 2; *PL* 38, 1013



Mary is a member of the Church since she depends upon the Saviour for all she is. She is Mother of the Church only in her relationship with the faithful in community. She exercises some causality over the formation of the Church as she exercises some causality over the formation of Christ. Hence, she is rightly called Mother of both.

Before concluding, we ought to consider two objections frequently raised against this title.

Some have objected that the declaration of this title *now* was not the most effective ecumenical gesture possible. There seems to be in this objection more of a problem with the timing than with the theology of this title. Without trying to answer this objection in its every aspect, it may be helpful for us to recall the attitude of some of the Reformers to Mary.

Luther, for example, in his *Table Talk* calls Mary "the new Church."<sup>14</sup>

At Christmas in 1523, Luther professes his belief that "there is no one amongst us who would not leave his own mother to become a son of Mary . . ."<sup>15</sup> "We are," he declares on another occasion, "the children of Mary."<sup>16</sup> Thus, in 1528, he concludes: "In very truth, Mary is our mother."<sup>17</sup> Boldly he declares in a Christmas talk of 1529: "Mary is the mother of Jesus and the mother of us all. All that (Christ) has must be ours, and his mother therefore also is ours."<sup>18</sup>

Luther is not the only Reformer who speaks thus of Mary. Ulrich Zwingli once preached:

I firmly believe according to the words of the Gospel that a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God and remained a Virgin pure and intact in childbirth and also after the birth, for all eternity.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. W. Tappolet, *Das Marienlob der Reformatoren* (Tubingen, 1962) 91.

<sup>15</sup> *Luthers Werke* (ed. Weimar, 1883) 11, 219.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 224.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 402.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 29, 665.

I firmly trust that she has been exalted by God to eternal joy above all creatures, both the blessed and angels.<sup>19</sup>

John Calvin, who had more of a problem with Mariology, nonetheless refers to Mary as a woman of faith and humility who is, therefore, a model and guide for all.<sup>20</sup> On another occasion, he speaks of "the glorious privilege which God bestowed on Mary by choosing her to be the mother of his only Son." He continues that it was she who "opened the way for God to accomplish his work."<sup>21</sup>

Nor is contemporary Protestant theology devoid of an interest in the devotion toward Mary. Hans Asmussen developed recently a Protestant Mariology quite sympathetic to Catholic concerns, in *Maria, die Mutter Gottes*.<sup>21a</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan commented recently that "neither the doctrine of the Church nor the doctrine of Christ can be fully articulated without some doctrine of Mary."<sup>22</sup> Max Thurian, in *Mary, Mother of all Christians*, makes a number of references to Mary's relationship with the Church. He says at one point that "to speak of Mary is to speak of the Church."<sup>23</sup> He goes on to draw out carefully the relationship of Mary to the Church and Mary's function as Mother of the Church.

Mary and the Church are closely united in the event of the Cross. . . .<sup>24</sup>

. . . she ceases to be the human mother of Christ who had power over her Son, and becomes the spiritual mother in the community of the Messiah. . . .<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Tappolet, *op. cit.*, 235

<sup>20</sup> J. Calvin, *Opera quae supersuerunt* (ed. Brunswick, 1891) 59, 129.

<sup>21</sup> J. Calvin, *Comment. on Luke* 1:42, 45.

<sup>21a</sup> Second ed., 1951

<sup>22</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, introduction to O. Semmelroth's *Mary Archetype of the Church* (New York, 1963) xii.

<sup>23</sup> Max Thurian, *Mary, Mother of All Christians* (New York, 1964) 9

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

... she gives birth to the faith of others, and shares in the motherhood of the Church <sup>26</sup>

By her faith, her hope, her charity, and her prayers she will be a spiritual mother of Mother Church ...<sup>27</sup>

The second objection raised against this title expresses some difficulty with it as theologically misleading. The problem raised by this objection is not merely with the timing of the declaration but with its theology. It must be admitted that the title does involve a certain risk. Yet the risk here is not as great, in fact somewhat less, than the risk the Church faces in calling Mary Mother of God. Some might understand by this latter title that Mary is Mother of the Divinity. What the Church intends, however, is to say that Mary is the Mother of Christ who is God. Just as the title "Mother of God" does not mean a superiority of Mary over God, so "Mother of the Church" does not suppose an absolute superiority of Mary over the Church. Mary, in fact, *serves* the mystery of the Church. Just as the title "Mother of God" does not make Mary a principal cause of the Incarnation, so the title "Mother of the Church" does not make Mary a principal cause of the formation or existence of the Church. In no way is the sovereignty of Christ over His Church compromised.

What theological values, then, does the title offer us?

1. First, it clarifies the membership of Mary in the Church as exclusive and unique. She is the only member of the Church who plays a role in the Church's birth and formation.
2. It clarifies Mary's function in the Church as, not only a type of the Church, but as an influence in the Church's attempt to be all it should be.
3. It clarifies Mary's closeness to Christ since she is Mother of His community.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 143

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

4 It clarifies Mary's nearness to us since it emphasizes the idea of community and solidarity.

5. It binds mariology and ecclesiology closely together.<sup>28</sup>

These, then, are some passing reflections of the title "Mother of the Church." The title seems to be almost a prayer by the Church that Mary, who exceeds the Church in her sanctity, might aid the Christian people as they go their pilgrim way to glory in repentance. It is a prayer also that she and her Son might bring all Christians back once again into one family, in one faith and in one Church.

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<sup>28</sup> For many of these insights I am indebted to J Galot and his article *Mère de l'Eglise*, in *NRT* 86 (1964) 1163-1184.