# Marian Studies

Volume 66 *Mary and Holy Families Living Today*                    Article 2

5-2015

# 'Mater Ecclesiae': History, Theology, and Consequences

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### Recommended Citation

# *MATER ECCLESIAE:* HISTORY, THEOLOGY, AND CONSEQUENCES

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*Ecclesiology involves an ongoing study of the Church that will be fruitful for understanding its present only if one explores the Church's past in search of the future. The ecclesiology of the mid-twentieth century rediscovered the close relationship between Mary and the Church, culminating in the title and the reality of Mater Ecclesiae (Mary, Mother of the Church).*

## Introduction

Much of what we call ecclesiology is in fact the history of trial and error in the pursuit of the Kingdom of God in this world. But there is more. Far from being purely clinical perception and assessment of things past and present, ecclesiology is a real-life story, the story of Jesus Christ and those who attempt to follow him. The deeply existential and provisional character of Church, and therefore the reflection about Church, cannot be downplayed or overlooked. In the course of history, this has led to antagonistic views and ways of living Church, some of which favored dissolution of social structures, others the hardening of institutional reality and domestication of the Spirit. However, the complexity of life and the freedom of the Spirit can never be banned. This makes ecclesiology a largely frustrating enterprise.

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It is, and always will be, *Mission Impossible* rather than foregone conclusion, and this in spite of the Church's ontological rootedness in the mystery of the triune God. Ecclesiology will be fruitful, if it explores the past in search of the future by way of an adequate understanding of the present.

The ecclesiology of the mid-twentieth century rediscovered the close relationship between Mary and the Church. Reading back into patristic tradition and its ecclesiotypical mariology, it initiated a process of reflection which led at the end of Vatican II to the solemn proclamation of the title "Mary, Mother of the Church." Whatever the controversy and subsequent silence surrounding this proclamation, the title *Maria, Mater Ecclesiae* is part of a multi-faceted endeavor of both ecclesiology and mariology to give the Church a more human face and, by the same token, a more Marian character. Developments in mariology after Vatican II highlight the Mary-Church relationship and its importance for *communio* ecclesiology. John Paul II writes (in his 1987 encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*): "In her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and every one *in* the Church, and embraces each and every one *through* the Church. In this sense Mary, Mother of the Church, is also the Church's model" (RM, 47). The intense personalist terminology used by the pope connects the Mary-Church relationship with *communio* ecclesiology. Indeed, communio ecclesiology is difficult to envision without a personalist relationship between Mary and the Church, flowing from her union with Christ, and pointedly articulated in Paul VI's proclamation of "Mary, Mother of the Church" (Paul VI, Discourse, November 21, 1964). This union was reiterated in his encyclicals *Signum Magnum* (SM, 1) and *Marialis Cultus* (MC, 28), and in John Paul II's *Redemptoris Mater* (RM, 24, 25, among others)

These writings deepened the teaching of Vatican II which, in turn, was reassumed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

(CCC, 963). Here, Mary, the spotless bride, is *the* example of the Church's holiness. In this, the Marian dimension of the Church precedes its Petrine character (CCC, 773). The *Catechism* further presents Mary as the *exemplary realization* of the Church, her *eschatological icon*, and *preeminent sign of hope* (CCC, 967, 972). Thus, Mary typifies on a personal level the meaning and the reality of communio ecclesiology. All these varied strands of the relation between Mary and the Church find their central expression in the title and the reality of "Mary, Mother of the Church."

## I. HISTORICAL ACCENTS

## A. Question of Method

Challenged by the need for an accurate historical perception of the *Mater Ecclesiae* title and its meaning, I engaged in three consecutive readings of the sources. In a first reading, I limited myself to a cumulative approach, trying to determine number and frequency of the title used, limiting myself to a statistical, not an explanatory, evaluation of its importance. This approach led from Leo I's Christmas homily, [1] with its reference to Bethlehem being the place of birth of the Church and not only of Jesus Christ, to Sebastian Tromp's lighthearted comment: "What hinders us to call her, who is the mother of Jesus and our mother, to call her also mother of the holy Church?" He remarked this at the International Marian/Mariological Congress of 1950 in Rome.[2]

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[1] Leo the Great, "Christmas homily, 26, 2, *In Nativitate Domini,* VI, 2; PL 54, 213 AB.

[2] Sebastian Tromp, SJ, 'De Zending van Maria en het Geheimnis der Kerk,' in *Alma Socia Christi: Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani . . . MCML celebrati* (13 vols.; Rome: Academia Mariana, 1951-1958), 11:295-305.

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We recognize in him the principal ghostwriter of Pope Pius XII's 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis.*[3]

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[3] We discover in the long list of direct or indirect contributors to the Mother of the Church title, important names: the Venerable Bede (+ 735), considered the first medieval source, but with the Holy Spirit as *Mater Ecclesiae*; Berengaudus, scil, the so-called *Expositio Berengaudi* (ca. 1150), about Revelation, the author of the first Marian attribution of the title *Maria mater sit Ecclesiae et filia*; Anselm (+ 1109), instrumental for the development of Mary's spiritual maternity and frequently cited with the expression: *Mater Dei est Mater nostra* (*Oratio* 52,7); Peter Damian ( +1072), who highlighted the descendance of the Church not only from Christ but also from Mary (*Sermo* 63); and Bernhard of Clairvaux (+1153) who posited Mary as standing between Head and Body: *Maria inter Christum et Ecclesiam constituta* (*Sermo de 12 praerogativis BMV,* PL 183, 432A). For the Victorines, Mary was the Mother of the whole Church; for Lambert Guerric, she was "Advocata, Illuminatrix, et Mater Ecclesiae." She was "Mater totius Ecclesiae" for Nicholas of Lyra and also for Ludolf of Saxony. Peter Venerabilis (+1156), introducing the *Salve Regina* in the monastic liturgy, invoked Mary as "virgo, Mater Ecclesiae" (*Mar. Lex. V,* 185), whereas the *Glossa ordinaria o*mitted "filia." Much later, Cornelius Lapide (+1637) expanded the title to all Christians: "B. Virg. haec enim mater est Christi, et consequenter Ecclesiae, id est, omnium Christianorum" (*Com. in Cant.,* c. 81 [Antwerp. 1670], 327, 2C); similarly, Pierre Nicole (+1695) declared: "La mère de toute l'Eglise" (*Instructions théologiques et morales* III [Paris 1742], 116). For J. J. Olier (+1657), Mary was "Mère de son Eglise" (Migne, *Oeuvres de M. Olier,* col. 883). G. Ventura (+1861) referred frequently to the title mother of the Church in combination with "our mother" and "mother of the faithful" (*La Madre di Dio,* I, ch. 8, 87). Pierre Jeanjacquot (+1891) called Mary "Mère de l'Eglise elle-même" (*Simples explications* [Paris, 1889], 194). For Leo XIV, Mary was "Ecclesiae mater et Regina Apostolorum," even "verissime quidem Mater Ecclesiae" (*De Rosario Mariali—Adjutricem populi*, 5.9.1895, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 28 [1895-96]: 130). These expressions were later rendered even more explicit by Pope John XXIII, whereas Pius XII limited himself to "eijus membrorum omnium mater" *(Mystici Corporis,* 1943, in AAS 35 [1943]: 247).

In a second approach, using a contextual method, I tried to determine the historico-theological contexts in which the title was formulated, used or ignored. The foremost conclusion of this approach highlighted the importance of the *ecclesiological* context in which the title was fashioned and used. It would seem possible to determine ten of these contexts[4]. Again, this second

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If the maternal character of the Church is very prominent in the patristic period (Tertullian, Cyprian), Mary is essentially "mater viventium." Ephrem opens the way for a Marian characterization, but both Ambrose (*Ecclesiae typus*) and Augustine (*Melior est ecclesia*) refrained from adopting the title. The ominous Magus epitaph does not have the weight of conclusive proof.

[4] The contextual arguments which led to the main characterizations of the rapport between Church and Mary can be summarized as follows:

Context I: the difference between the East-West mentality: Mary as singular creature of the East becomes *typus,* archetype and model in the West

Context II: the complementarity of two theological perspectives: Incarnational versus Soteriological tradition—the mother of Christ (Thomas) and the spiritual mother (Bonaventure).

Context III: the importance of the *Christus-totus* theology: Mary in giving birth to Christ also gave birth to the Church, his body (Carolingian theology; Berengaudus).

Context IV: Mary taking the place of the Church in medieval times: importance of titles like *domina*, queen, *advocata,* mother of mercy and compassion, *Janua coeli,* aquaeduct; in general, amplification of Mary's motherhood of the Church.

Context V: the Counter-Reformation idea of the Church as "societas perfecta" in contrast with growing collectivization: "Coetus fidelium" (Bellarmine), "ecclesia omnium Christianorum" (Lapide). Concurrently, there was a growing importance of the spiritual individual (Berulle, Olier), and incipient variation on the spiritual maternity (Paciuchelli), but also the return to *typus, figura* (Nadal).

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methodological investigation led from the concrete, loving *Mater viventium* of the Eastern tradition to the contrasting Western, more abstract and representational, *typus* and archetypical figure, to the always-present and underlying theological option of an either incarnational or soteriological interest for the formulation of the *Mater Ecclesiae* title. A further observation led to the confirmation that whenever scission occurred between Mary and the Church the importance of Our Lady dramatically increased. This can be observed in the high-medieval period due to a growing devaluation of the Church, or during the centuries following the Reformation when the Church became "societas perfecta" with an evident gubernatorial stamp on its identity.

Context VI: Eecclesiology of the individual and the collectivity in contrast to Church as body: The 19th century accentuated Mary's role as mother of the people, of all true Christians, of the Whole Church (Ventura, Terrien).

Context VII: late in the 19th century, growing reintegration of Mary in the Church, with J. Th. Laurent and M. Scheeben, and theological expansion of this relationship. Parallel to these developments there was a strong christotypical movement.

Context VIII: in the early 20th century, strong insistence on mediation of all graces, universal mediation of the human race as a consequence of christotypical mariology.

Context IX: reawakening of Ecclesiology from *societas perfecta* to *Mystici Corporis*: focus on mystical and concrete perspective, on community (Body of Christ) rather than institution: Mary seen as the spiritual mother of the Mystical Body, "ejus membrorum omnium mater" (Pius XII).

Context X: retrieval of ecclesiotypical mariology, inspired by a patristic reading of Mariology; *nouvelle theologie* after 1950, et al.; change of opinion regarding the title *Mater Ecclesiae* after 1958 for authors like Congar, Laurentin, Koehler, Schmaus.

In the first case, Mary takes up a compensatory function as Queen, *Mater misericordiae,* and spiritual mother. In the second situation, Mary evolves to the ultimate figure of mediation, both in acquiring and dispensing grace. The term of the ten contexts mentioned leads to the retrieval of ecclesiotypical mariology in Vatican II. If the intention of the council fathers was indeed the integration of Mary into the Church to exorcise the hypertrophic importance given to her during the latter part of the so-called Marian Century, the actual document, *Lumen Gentium* (chapter 8), speaks a different language. It offers a theological convergence and incipient synthesis of christotypical, ecclesiological, and anthropological perspectives.

The third reading was done in an *exemplary fashion,* searching for the most typical individual formulations of the *Mater Ecclesiae* title.[5] My selection centered on six authors:

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[5] There are some exemplary expressions or formulations of the *Mater Ecclesiae* (ME) title which are inspirational for the theological mind but are also precious witnesses of the perennial importance of this title:

I. Augustine (+430), in *Sermo Denis* 25.7 and in *De Sancta Virg.* 6 (PL 40.399), reminds us of the superiority of the Church: "Sed melior est ecclesia … Quia Maria portio est." However, both are inextricably linked: "Maria plane mater membrorum ejus, quod nos sumus, quia cooperata est caritate, et fideles in ecclesia nascerentur." The Church is the permanent mother of Christians. Mary is the figure of salvation history. She participates in the Incarnation, retreating subsequently into the *Communio Sanctorum.*

II. Bonaventure (+1274) summarizes the Mary-Church relation as follows: "Unum genuit carnalites, omne tamen genus humanum genuit spiritualites" (*De Nta., BVM Sermo I—Opera IX*, 70b). It can be argued that for Bonaventure there exists a perichoresis between Mary and Church: Mary's motherhood and that of the Church merge and mingle, and cannot be separated (*Collatio VI de donis spir.,* 20—*Opera omnia V*, 487). Church is essentially a spiritual reality, thus the importance of Mary as spiritual mother.

III. Dionysius the Carthusian (+1471) contributes a synthesis of the ME discourse, and recognizes in Mary "Dei Genitricem et Totius Ecclesiae Matrem" (*De auctoritate,* XXXV, 645). He often mentions the title, which is subordinate to Jesus Christ. He incorporates Mary to the Church, and makes special reference to Peter, to whom Mary is subject after Pentecost.

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Augustine, Bonaventure, Dionysius the Carthusian, Jerome Nadal, Matthias Scheeben, and Edith Stein. Originality, the historical context, and the actual formulation played an important role in the selection. However, it would be a grave oversight indeed to ignore the vastly determining contributions made by theologians of the recent past, like Journet, de Lubac,

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IV. Jerome Nadal (+1580), in his 1595 *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, describes Mary as "Ecclesiae mater et Filia." Establishing the following perichoresis, he signals the reciprocal motherhood between Mary and the Church: "Maria peperisse nobis Deum, dedisse mediatorem et redemptorem. Quocirca Mater est utroque utriusque: Ecclesia Mariae, Maria Ecclesiae." (*Adnotationes,* 616).

V. M. J. Scheeben (+1888) sees in Mary the "Mother and Heart of the Church." Scheeben's systematic approach to the Mary-Church question in *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik* (3:621 ff.), highlights the following aspects:

1. Mary is the one who mediates the relation between Jesus Christ and the Church; she is thus also the Mother of the Church.
2. Mary operates in a foundational way at the origin and for the realization of human regeneration in redemption, whereas the Church operates only in or for the attribution or distribution of salvation.
3. Nonetheless, Mary is the principal member and heart of the Church. Thus, her motherhood commingles with that of the Church, in a way similar to the union of fatherhood between Jesus Christ and God the Father.
4. However, the motherhood of Mary remains always the root and soul of the motherhood of the Church.
5. The motherhood of the Church exists and is operative only as long and as far as the motherhood of Mary is included in it and effective.
6. Between Mary's motherhood and that of the Church exists such an intimate relationship or perichoresis that each can only be properly or adequately perceived in the other.
7. Mary is "imago totius Trinitatis: Filia Patris, Sponsa Filii, Templum Spiritus Saucti."
8. Mary is the dynamic and authoritative organ of the Holy Spirit. Together they form one moral person.

VI. Edith Stein (+1943) declared Mary the Heart of the Church:

1. Mary is the most perfect symbol of the Church: she is origin and archetype of the Church.
2. She is the singular organ of the Church, from which the whole mystical body, and, yes, from which the Head of the Church was formed.
3. We call her Heart of the Church to highlight her central and essential position as singular organ of the Church.
4. Mary is mother in a real and eminent way, superior to any earthly form of Motherhood. (See "Die Frau," in *Ehe und Beruf,* 1962, 122.)

Barré, and Congar, or to forget the importance of promoters of the past, such as Berengaudus, Peter Venerabilis, the *Glossa Ordinaria,* Cornelius a Lapide, Pierre Nicole, J. Th. Laurent, and Gioachino Ventura.[6]

## B. History and Meaning of the Title

In summary, there are five strands of interpretation, most prominent and decisive, which characterize the history of the *Mater Ecclesiae* discourse:

1. The *mirror* effect. The Church reads and explicates itself in Mary, and vice versa. The mirror effect gives the impression of a theological stalemate or a dialectical exercise in "*yes, but*," as could be induced from Nadal's "Ecclesia Mariae, Maria Ecclesiae." In fact, the mirror effect attempts to position properly the two ends of the comparison in order to determine their common ground.

2. The *personalizing tendency.* This approach attributes to both Mary and Church *personal* characteristics or *personalizing* traits. It does so, but differently and according to different circumstances. Typical for this method would be to give Mary the status of a corporate personality in order to allow for comparability with the Church. Conversely, the Church would be described as a *coetus* of shepherds and faithful, to bring her down on a same notional level with Mary, the individual person. This personalizing tendency is intimately related to the spiritual and mystical relationship between the two (e.g., when the Church is identified with the Mystical Body

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[6] Most of these names are also found in notes 3, 4, and 5 above.

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and Mary engages in a variety of specifically *mediating* activities).

3. The *ecclesiological identification* of Church and Mary, or both. As mentioned previously, the concrete historical context has always been instrumental in fashioning the relationship between Mary and Church, not only in the Patristic era, but also in subsequent periods of Church history.

4. The *Christus-totus-theology*. The most decisive factor in forming the *Mater Ecclesiae* title can be seen in the *Christus-totus*-theology. This particular factor not only binds both Mary and the Church indissolubly to Jesus Christ, incarnate God and redeemer, but it also determines to a high degree Mary's importance for the Church. The *Christus-totus*-theology unifies or brings together incarnational theology and soteriology. As the history of the *Mater Ecclesiae* title shows, the specific emphasis on the Incarnation will have a somewhat limitative impact on the role of Mary, whereas a pronounced soteriological emphasis highlights Mary's role as spiritual mother for the Church.

5. The *existential yearning for the mother.* Finally, and somewhat bluntly, I would like to mention the *existential yearning for the mother* in all periods of history. This may not be a scientific statement, and thus difficult to ascertain plainly, however, authoritative voices like Rahner, Balthasar, Ratzinger, and many others before and after them, would agree with Benedict XVI: "It has always been the mother who reached the people … and

made Christ accessible to them." [7] The existential yearning never fails to point its frequently miserable face from behind the stiff curtains of systematic theology in order to let us know that there can or should be no hiatus between concrete reality and its interpretation.

## II. THE MOTHER OF THE CHURCH TITLE AT THE COUNCIL

It would not be abusive to say that the discussion, or rather the absence of discussion, of this title was colored by political interests—some related to ill perception and communication, but mainly dictated by divergent ecclesiological understandings of Mary. A lack of knowledge about, or insufficient information regarding, the tradition of this title reinforced the idea that *Mater Ecclesiae* was not opportune at the time of the Council.

### A. Between Politics and Theology

Cardinal Roy of the Theological Commission spoke to the topic in October 1964, highlighting that the title was not wrong but it could easily be misinterpreted, giving the impression that Mary would be separated from the Church. Roy likewise affirmed that the title was without any strong tradition, that it originated in the twelfth century but was never widely disseminated. These arguments were shared by *periti* like Congar, Laurentin, and Philips, to mention only some. Charles Balic, influential and instrumental in promoting the more traditional view of mariology, was not involved in the discussion

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[7] Ratzinger and Seewald, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time* (a conversation with Peter Seewald) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 300. For Balthasar, Mary is the "*universale concretum* of the Church" (*Der antiromische Affekt* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 164.

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regarding the title. Besides, he was not known to be a champion of ecclesiotypical mariology.

Criticisms which arose after the Council regarding the rejection of the title cover a wide array of arguments:

1. There existed among what was called the "majority" of the Council a strong *aversion* against neo-scholastic mariology and its centering on the so-called privilege-mariology, favoring in its christotypical modality a certain parallelism, even a marked independence, between Mary and the Church.

The major interest of the new mariology was to show Mary in human context, as daughter of Adam, daughter Zion, and servant of the Lord. As faith-filled mother of Jesus, she belonged to the incarnational and not primarily soteriological discourse. Her place was that of the *Communio Sanctorum,* albeit as an extraordinary member of the Church.[8]

Conversely, the title Mother of the Church was reminiscent of privileges like coredemption and mediation, and therefore suggested separation from Church and co-causality with Christ. There was a certain fear, or at least the impression of it, that the title would co-opt the title of *Mediatrix Omnium Gratiarum.* Furthermore, the *Mystici-Corporis*-ecclesiology had lost impetus in the late 1950s. Instead of the body symbolism, the Church now used the symbol of the people of God to identify itself. It can be assumed that the rejection of the *Mater Ecclesiae* title by the theological commission was based on the perception

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[8] See: A. Acerbi, *Due ecclesiologie. Ecclesiologia giuridica ed ecclesiologia di comunione nella 'Lumen Gentium,'* (Bologna, 1975). See esp. E. M. Toniolo, *La Beata Maria Vergine nel Concilio Vaticano II* (Roma, 2004), who documents all stages of elaboration of the Marian text.

that this new title was an outgrowth of the *Mystici-Corporis-*ecclesiology. Some of that perception can be verified in Laurentin's interventions with the theological commission. Opposing the original Balić title of the Marian schema, namely, *De Maria, Matre Jesu et Matre Ecclesiae,* Laurentin proposed, in October 1961: *De Maria, Mater Corporis Mystici;* in December of the same year: *De Maria, Mater capitis et mater membrorum Corporis Mystici,* and, in March 1962: *De Beata Virgine Maria, Mater Dei et Mater hominum.*[9]

All this does not mean that the People of God image carried the day. In retrospect, de Lubac looked with a certain distance at this identity of the Church, and remarked: "*Lumen Gentium* does not sufficiently correspond to the much more grounded and corroborating notion of *Corpus Christi Mysticum.* The preferred image of People of God remains vague."[10]

A further argument in favor of rejection pointed to the vagueness of the title, its symbolic and image character, the absence of a hermeneutically convincing foundation. There was of course also the ecumenical argument claiming misunderstanding and offensiveness. Indeed, not only Thurian[11]

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[9] R. Laurentin, "La proclamation de Marie 'Mater Ecclesia' par Paul VI," in: *Paolo VI e i problemi ecclesiologici al Concilio, Colloquio internazionale di studio, Brescia, 19-20-21 settembre 1986* (Brescia, 1989), 310-75.

[10] H. de Lubac, *Krise zum Heil? Spannungen in der Kirche nach dem Konzil* (Berlin, 2002), 12; *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Eglise* (Paris, 1967), (Germ. [Einsiedeln, 1967], 41 fol.).

[11] M. Thurian, *Mère du Seigneur* (Taizé, 1962), (Germ.: *Maria* [Mainz,, 1965], 236).

and Scrima,[12] but also Maximos IV Saigh[13] rejected the title. Especially noted was the opposition of Cardinal Bea.[14]

Again, in retrospect, the voices questioning a thorough or even sufficient understanding of the title Mother of the Church, based on sufficient available information, seemed to have a solid argument. This may not be true for all specialists. Roschini published on November 22, 1964, a detailed study on the origin and importance of the title, which may have been available to Paul VI in the preparation of his solemn proclamation.

2.  Not only theological reasons seem to have precluded the insertion of the title in *Lumen Gentium*. Critics spoke of the latent opposition [15] between the Theological Commission and the Coordinating Committee, the latter suspected of being the voice and arm of the Curia. After the Theological Commission eliminated *Mater Ecclesiae* from the Balić Schema, the Coordinating Commission changed the title again with the approval of John XXIII, who had used the title during his pontificate repeatedly and explicitly, [16] to *De Beata Maria Virgine, Mater Ecclesiae.* What they did not do was to consult with the

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[12] A. Scrima, "Notes du professeur Scrima sur la théologie mariale en Orient" (3.10.1964).

[13] Maximos IV Saigh, AS II/3, 788 (=*Animadversiones Scriptor*).

[14] A. Bea, AS II/3, 677-81 (opposition against new Marian definitions); *L'unione dei Christiani* (Roma, 1962), 126f.

[15] A. Dittrich, *Mater Ecclesiae. Geschichle und Bedeutung eines umstrittenen Marientitels,* DBS 44 (Würzburg: Echter, 2009), 614f.

[16] D. Bertetto. *Maria Mater Ecclesiae*, Biblioteca del Salesianum. 70 (Torino, 1965), 35-37: "Il titolo di Mater Ecclesiae, che egli ripetutamente rivolge a Maria" (35).

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Theological Commission. This incident seemed to have reinforced a sentiment of curial despotism which had to be opposed. And with the support of members of the ad-hoc committee, and the agreement of people like Congar and Laurentin, [17] as well as other members of the Theological Commission, Philips proceeded to eliminate definitively the title "Mother of the Church."

In different regard, the vote *in cumulo* without a detailed examination of chapters and paragraphs, was still another bone of contention which further separated maximalists and minimalists.[18]. Here is how Laurentin, *post factum,* summarized the tensions surrounding the discussions regarding the title:

> Quant aux raisons pour et contre, une pensée objective est difficile. Les meilleures raisons, rarement développées, étaient celle de Dom Prou: la relation de Marie à l'Eglise, n'est pas épuisée par sa condition de membre, ni même de type, et son antériorité (signifiée aussi par *typus ecclesiae*) est opportunément signifiée par le mot "Mère," qui définit sa vocation et son rapport spécifique tant au Christ qu'à l'Eglise. On s'étonne que le seul texte biblique susceptible de fonder, en quelque manière, *Mater Ecclesiae* (ou plus précisément "Mère des disciples"), Marie a la Croix (Jn 19, 25-27) n'ait pas trouvé place dans ce débat. Bref, les meilleures raisons pour le titre misaient sur la relation Marie-Eglise caractérisée par sa fonction maternelle, selon la vocation et finalité par Dieu déterminée.[19]

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[17] Dittrich, *Mater Ecclesiae*, 857.

[18] Dittrich, *Mater Ecclesiae*, 638.

[19] Laurentin, "La Proclamation," 369.

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Laurentin, who first opposed but consequently supported the title "Mother of the Church,"[20] sees the deeper meaning of Paul VI's initiative in the attempt to *balance* the inclusion or integration of Mary and her glorification in the Church.[21]

## B. The Proclamation

The proclamation is in some ways, at least, a beautiful literary balancing act; an even more beautiful declaration of love to Mary, and, not least, the expression of papal prerogatives. The following list describes ten features of this proclamation:

1. Paul VI's intervention was not an attempt to correct the Council.[22] His intention was to complete what the Council had done, and to give it a deeper and more comprehensive meaning.[23]

2. The Pope was careful to balance and juggle the many pieces of the conciliar vision of Mary, in particular that she must not be separated from the human race; she is part of the universal Church, and Christ is the sole mediator. There was no intention to reintroduce the debate about mediation and co-redemption. He stressed

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[20] Dittrich*, Mater Ecclesiae,* 571-72.

[21] Laurentin, "La Proclamation," 375.

[22] Paul VI, General Audience, 18.11.64, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (OR), 18 Nov., 1964, p.1.

[23] Paul VI highlighted Mary as "il suo vertice" for Church. The doctrine of the Church elaborated by the council was perceived as "una esaltatione dell'umanita," and in Mary was found the fullness of human perfection. The indirect reference to Benedict XIV's *amantissima mater* for Mary was used by Paul VI as *captatio benevolentiae* to introduce the new title (OR 18 Nov., 1964, p.1).

Mary's faith, her being the *kecharitomene,* and a model of virtue.

3. In Paul VI's wording, the title of *Mater Ecclesiae* (ME) was couched in plain incarnational theology. The point of departure for the proclamation of ME was grounded in Mary's maternal intimacy and proximity with her Son and his mission. Golgotha and Pentecost were mentioned but without being given weight.[24] Mary was not pictured as mediatrix of grace but as the chosen woman who gave birth to the source of salvation.

4. Mary, as presented, does not prevent immediacy between God and the soul through prayer, since he is ultimately the sole mediator. But the Pope did not forget to reference Fatima and the Immaculate Heart to placate his more traditional constituencies.

5. It is important to note that Paul VI presented Mary not as the mother of the ecclesial institution but as the mother of *pastoribus et fidelibus,* taking into account [25] emendation of the Theological Commission.

6. He referred to the title as an established expression of piety—and here he slightly exaggerated!—in the whole Church.

7. The text of the proclamation made good use of the witnesses of tradition. With Augustine he shared the appellation of supereminent member; with Rupert of

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[24] G. Söll, *Die Mutter Christi* (Munich, 1993), 28.

[25] "Matrem Ecclesiae, hoc est totius populi christiani, tam fidelium quam Pastorum," AAS 56 [1964]: 1017).

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Deutz, the *portio maxima* and *optima*. Further insisting, he confirmed Gerhoh of Reichersberg's *portio praecipua, electissima*. Instead of using *typus ecclesiae*, he borrowed from Ambrose Mary's model character as the one who sings the praise of God, an encouragement for all Christians. Mary was called *sorror nostra* with Athanasius,[26] a title Paul VI affectionated much and used frequently.

8. The title "Mater Ecclesiae" was a title of honor, but with the goal to highlight Mary's singularity and eminence with regard to the Church.

9. Based on the *Body-of-Christ ecclesiology*, the title reaffirmed the dependence of the Church with regard to Christ, and in subtle ways characterized the relationship between Pope and Council.

10. Paul VI left no doubt that the title of "Mother of the Church" was precious and dear to him: *acceptus gratusque,* as he said. He desired this proclamation, indeed!

As is well known, when still Cardinal Montini, he (Paul VI) used the title on September 8, 1959, on the occasion of transmitting to the faithful of the Milan archdiocese the announcement of the Council. He then concluded his homily: "Let us be close to the Mother of the Church."[27] We also know of three interventions he made on behalf of this title. As Cardinal Montini, on December 5, 1962, he expressed his satisfaction that

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[26] G. Söll, *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Herder, 1978), III/4, 236-37.

[27] Lourentin, "La Proclamation," 319f.

the Council was going to honor Mary under this title. [28] On October 11, 1963, as pope, Paul VI expressed the wish before the Council that, in the *great vision* of the Church, Mary might be recognized as Mother of the Church, the Mother of God and our mother. [29] Again, on December 4, 1963, adding determination and urgency to his words, the pope requested unanimity and expressed dedication to recognize Mary as the Mother of the Church.[30]

These recommendations were not followed by the Council. However, they translated the pope's deep conviction that this Council was going to be centered on the *Church*. In the pope's perception, and with his agreement, Mary [and the schema about her] was going to be integrated in the Constitution on the Church—not to demean her, but to show her preeminence.

## C. The Impact of the Mother of the Church Title

The Mariological Society of America, which devoted its 1958 Convention to explore the relationship between Mary and Church,[31] has been more discreet on the topic since its solemn proclamation in 1964. Mary as Mother of the Church was addressed in 1966 by Fr. Anthony T. Padovano,[32] In 1986, an article by Charles W. Neumann studied Mary and the Church in

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[28] Giovanni B. Montini, in *Sulla Madonna: Discorsi e scritti (1955-1963),* ed. René Laurentin (Brescia: Istituto Paulo VI, 1988), 209, but especially in ASI, 4:292.

[29] Montini, *Discorsi e scritti,* 35-36.

[30] AAS 56 (1964): 37.

[31] *Marian Studies* (MS) 9 (1958), with contributions by J. A. Elbert, J. F. Sweeney, F. L. B. Cunningham, B. J. LeFrois, and C. Vollert.

[32] A. T. Padovano, "Mary, Mother of the Church," MS 17 (1966): 27-45.

*Lumen Gentium,* arts. 60-65,[33] and, in the 1994 presidential address, Fr. Matthew F. Morry addressed the perspective of Mary's realized eschatology.[34] The question could be raised: Did this title have a marked influence on the life and understanding of the Church about herself?

The assessment presents some difficulties, not least among them the common-place nature of the title. The title has a generic character and easily mutates from "Mother of the Church," to "Mother of All People," or simply to "Mother." And as such, the term, or title, covers enormous ground without making noticeable theological waves. The reference to "mother" is so genuinely and pervasively Marian that the *genus proximum* is hardly always perceived. In a somewhat generalizing characterization, it could be said that the title entered the language of the Church almost without being noted, exuberantly so in the Latin world where it was always implicitly present, but ignored for a long time in the parts of the world still challenged by the Christianity of the Reformation.

A classical example of the latter can be found in writings of Pope Benedict XVI. As theologian he was rather reticent, but as pope he used the title as a legitimate expression of the Marian discourse at Vatican II. In a homily on December 8, 2005, he explained this: "Paul VI has all that made clear at the promulgation of the Constitution on the Church, thanks to a new title deeply rooted in tradition. He did it with the intention to elucidate the internal structure of the Church developed at

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[33] Ch. W. Neumann, "Mary and the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Arts. 60 to 65," MS 37 (1986): 96-142.

[34] M. F. Morry, "Mary, Type of the Church: Eschatology Realized (Presidential Address)," MS 45 (1994): 272-282.

Vatican II."[35] For Benedict, too, to be Catholic means to be Marian, and that means "love for the Mother, that in the Mother and by the Mother we find the Lord."[36]

What counts for this pope is a personalized relationship with Mary, where her presence, her companionship—demonstrative and performative characteristics of our relationship with her—are more important than titles. Where Benedict uses titles, they frequently refer to the woman, to sign, mirror, icon, but also model. All these characteristics [37]—like teaching, showing, leading, listening and helping—have an evident maternal accent.

His predecessors used the title abundantly and spontaneously, as can be seen in A. Anderson's licentiate thesis about the proclamation of Mary as *Mater Ecclesiae* and in the encyclicals of John Paul II.[38] As pope, John Paul II granted Croatia (and Poland) the celebration of a feast in honor of Mother of the Church on the Monday after Pentecost. In 1980, he included the title of "Mother of the Church" in the Litany of Loreto and commissioned, in 1981, the *Mater Ecclesiae* mosaic placed in Saint Peters. The 1987 *Collectio Missarum BVM*

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[35] Benedict XVI, "Homily on the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, Rome (*Capella papale*), 8 December 2005." The pope expands: "Indeed, with this title the Pope [Paul VI] summed up the Marian teaching of the Council and provided the key to understanding it." In his own and typical formulation: "Since she was totally united to Christ, she also totally belongs to us." The closeness of Mary is explained in Christ's "being here for us."

[36] Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Men's Marian Sodality of Regensburg, Rome, Saturday, 28 May 2012."

[37] J. Roten, "'Mary, Personal Concretization of the Church,' Elements of Benedict XVI's Marian Thinking," MS 57 (2006): 313-316.

[38] A. Anderson, "Mary, Mater Ecclesiae: The Solemn Proclamation of Pope Paul VI" (Tesis de Licenciatura, Pamplona 1992).

features three special masses called "Image and Mother of the Church." The first of these masses was composed already in 1974, and shortly afterwards was inserted in the second *editio typica* edition of the Roman Missal. Likewise, and under John Paul II, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* now features a short treatise on this title, giving evidence to Mary's inseparable union with Christ, her active presence at the beginning of the Church, her association with the disciples, her role as *Assumpta* and mother in the order of grace.[39]

John Paul II seems to highlight in particular Mary's motherly care, her faith preceding that of the Church, and her role as the woman of Pentecost leading the Church to new evangelization. The unity of Mother and Church is thus not of a primarily formal nature. The pope of the *Acting Person* sees the unity of both warranted in faith and apostolate reminiscent of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, but he will also say that the Marian character is the formal principle of the Church.[40]

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[39] "Mary's Motherhood with Regard to the Church," CCC, 964-970; 972. The Mary-Church title is one of the central Marian motifs of John Paul II's pontificate. A telling symbol of this endeavor is the Marian mosaic on the wall of the Vatican palace, placed there in December of 1981 and accompanied by the inscription: *Mater Ecclesiae* (OR, Dec. 8-12-1981, p.1).

[40] Offering a concise formulation of the Mary-Church title, John Paul II writes: "Maria est Mater Ecclesiae, quia ex ineffabili electione per ipsum Aeternum Patrem peracta atque peculiari Spiritus Amoris operante virtute [LG 56], vitam humanam dedit Filio Dei, 'propter quem omnia et per quem omnia' [Hebr 2,10] et a quo totus Populus Dei gratiam et dignitatem electionis suae accepit" (AAS 71 [1979]:321).

Although ridiculed as a "mediterranean high prize *panegyricus*" by Semmelroth and Beinert,[41] the title has been the object of a number of theological studies of importance. To mention some: Jean Galot's repeated commitment to the study of the topic, already in 1959, again in 1964, 1966, and 1982. In 1985, Galot discussed the reception of the title since 1964, and complained about the German ignorance of the title.[42] Important contributions were also made by J. Aldama, W. Dürig, B. Forte, and A. Ziegenaus. [43] In 1982, *Ephemerides Mariologicae* devoted issue 2-3 to this theme.[44] As previously mentioned, G. Roschini presented his findings about the *Mater Ecclesiae* theme in *L'Osservatore Romano* already in 1964.[45] The same is true for Domenico Bertetto and his 1965 study on the title in the

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[41] W. Beinert, *Heute von Maria reden* (Freiburg, 1974), 55. The title was understood as a concession made to mediterranean mentality. Semmelroth, in his somewhat critical commentary of *Lumen Gentium* in *Lexikon fur Theologie und Kirche* (LThk-Kommentar), J. Hofer, K. Rahner, et al., eds; 2, ed., 14 vols. (Freiburg. 1957-68), may have had some impact on the German reaction to the Mother-Church title (LThk-EI [1967], 327).

[42] J. Galot, "Marie et l'Eglise," *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* (NRTh) 81 (1959): 113-31; "Théologie du titre Mère de l'Eglise," *Ephemerides Mariologicae* (EphMar) 32 (1982): 159-73; "Maria: mediatrice o madre universal?" *Civilta Cattolica* (CivCatt) 147 (1996): 232-44.

[43] Most of these contributions fall in the period between 1964-1969; they are comments made at regular meetings of national mariological gatherings and at the International Mariological-Marian Congress of Santo Domingo in 1965.

[44] "Maria, Mater Ecclesiae," EphMar 32, nos.2-3 (1982), has contributions by Galot, Pikaza, D. Fernandez, Molina Prieto, Garrido Bonano, Casanovas Cortes, and Alfonso Rivera. The articles deal with theological foundations and the importance of the historical sources for the Mother Church title.

[45] OR (22 Nov, 1964), p.1.

pontificates from Gregory XVI to that of Paul VI. [46] René Laurentin published his findings on the history, the motives, and the meaning of "La Proclamation de Marie 'Mater Ecclesiae' par Paul VI. Extra Concilium mais in Concilio," in the publications of the Brescia Institut of Paul VI in 1989. Fr. Anderson wrote his licentiate thesis on this topic in 1992, and offered the proclamation of the title as "one comprehensive explanation, *edification.*" The Pope "saw a stress fracture, as it were, in the edifice of the Church. He knew of the divided state of the study of Mary." [47] The most comprehensive, up-to-date, and ponderous work on the subject to date is that of Achim Dittrich.[48]

## III. THEOLOGICAL CORNERSTONES

## A. The Language of Symbols

The *Mater Ecclesiae* title is, as most Marian titles are, a highly symbolic construct. This should not surprise because theological language is steeped in symbolic expression. The reason for this lies in the most central of all theological endeavors, namely, to document and comment upon the relation between God and humanity. Thus, at the heart of theology there is the symbol in its Greek meaning. *Symbolon* means one-half of a knucklebone carried as a token of identity and search, meaning

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[46] D. Bertetto, *Maria Mater Ecclesiae,* Biblioteca del Salesianum, 70 (Torino, 1965), 63p.

[47] Anderson, "Mary, Mater Ecclesiae," 106.

[48] Achim Dittrich, *Mater Ecclesiae. Geschichte und Bedeutung eines umstrittenen Marientitels* (Echter, 2009), 1168 p.

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the identity that is mine only partially and the search that will lead me to the missing piece of myself.[49]

The human person in quest for his or her God is one-half of a knucklebone. So is the lover in quest of his beloved, and the poet at the mercy of his reader. We are not self-sufficient, we are not entirely whole unto ourselves; such is the message and meaning of the *symbolon*. Faith tells us that the other half, the better half of our identity, lies in God; and we have faith—proof of this—in Jesus Christ. But, precisely, this makes Jesus Christ the ultimate symbol of God, the primary analogy between heaven and earth, the *Real symbol* of the Trinity, and the *universale concretum* of all reality.[50]

It is no surprise, therefore, that our way of expressing these realities has *symbolic* character. In fact, theological language becomes symbolic when personal aspects of Revelation enter the picture. Abstract language lacks the depth and width of symbols. This is why Card. Scheffczyk, among others, insists: theological statements are not possible without the recourse to symbolico-imaginative language. However, for the symbol, being a complex and multi-faceted reality, we use *complimentary* terminology[51] to highlight specific aspects of the symbolic discourse. I would like to mention six of them:

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[49] J. Roten, "Mary, Theology and Poetry," *Marianum* 71 (2009): 339.

[50] Sec H. Denzinger and P. Hünermann, eds. (DH), *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (43rd ed.; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012): DH 3015, DH 3016, DH 806, and *Dei Verbum,* 12 (based on 2 Cor 5.6).

[51] Complimentary technology highlights two complementary aspects of symbol. It takes into account the foundational reality of the unity between immanence and transcendence as result of Revelation, and, at the same time, the various concrete applications of the unity between God and humanity.

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1. *Analogical* symbolization highlights the *unity* between God and humanity in both their similarity and dissimilarity. In the Mother of the Church title it states the *effective* unity between Mary and the Church. Simultaneously, analogy signals limitation in their relationship and correspondence between both of them.

2. Symbolic language is indebted to *typology,* which grounds and facilitates the understanding of salvation history as a *continuum*, as promise leading to fulfillment, but also as the constant challenge presented by the *Deus semper major*. The typological view sets the *Mater Ecclesiae* title in the context of salvation history, spanning not only Incarnation and Redemption, but also the eschatological realization of salvation history. The historical continuum, therefore, highlights the permanent relationship between Mary and Church, and the specific role attributed to them all along the history of salvation. Here is the *Sitz im Leben* of both the Marian archetype and the eschatological icon of the Church.

3. There is also a *dialectical* dimension involved in symbolic discourse. Its purpose is one of clarification and distinction—as we know it from the mirror-effect between Mary and the Church. Distinction in comparison allows for a clearer identification of each. At the same time, the dialectical approach sets in motion a secret dynamism toward more and better—applicable either to an improved knowledge of Mary and Church separately, or a more explicit convergence between the two.

4. The *paradoxical* character of symbolic statements prolongs the dialectical perception of reality. But against a purely dialectical vision and interpretation of reality, the paradoxical understanding is yearning and seeking

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deeper meaning and unity of contradictory statements. The paradox is not in itself synthesis, but is a promise and a challenge. The paradox, according to de Lubac, is "the provisional expression of a view which remains incomplete but whose orientation is ever toward fullness"[52] It is this orientation towards fullness that triggers a tremendous dynamism of research, experimentation, dedication, and renewal of intellectual as well as moral qualities.

This may also be the secret key to a deeper understanding of the relationship between Mary and Church, between mother Mary and mother Church. This deeper meaning and unity is found for both in the common root and source of Jesus Christ himself, and thus in the involvement of both in the whole of salvation history. The measuring against the common and permanent ground of their existence will also help to determine the priority, preeminence, and intensity of relation, which in this case is one of the reasons to make Mary mother of the Church.

At this point, it should be added that the approach toward a comprehensive, that is to say a theologically just, way of looking at Mary invariably leads to the observation that Mary is a deeply *paradoxical* figure. Mother of the Redeemer, she is the first of the redeemed; Creature of God, she is mother of the eternal Logos in the world. She is mother, but still virgin. As Mother of the Church, she had to be first Mother of the Lord, and remains daughter of the Church while being its mother. A rightly understood paradox avoids unilateralism, but more important it

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[52] Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes of the Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 9.

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opens the way to greater depth of understanding and thus to spiritual enrichment and maturity.

5. Even *dogma* pays tribute to symbolic language. The very central idea of dogma, and of all dogmas, is to state and safeguard the full reality and meaning of Jesus Christ, the God-man. This is true for all Marian dogmas, but also for the *Mater Ecclesiae* title, since it highlights both Incarnation and Redemption, points out in *Maria Assumpta* the human realization of salvation history, and promises for the Church the eschatological fulfillment in the Glorious Christ.

6. Titles involve an existential dimension made of affection, admiration, and imitation. We call this the *exemplary* character of symbolic language. The title of *Mater Ecclesiae* is not given to us for an abstract contemplation of its truth and beauty. The title comes with a moral challenge. Without exhausting all of the practical consequences, we may say that because we contemplate in Mary the exemplary realization and concretization of Church through obedience, hope, charity, and faith, we are prompted to find our personal and communitarian, practical and existential modality to being Church, as it is given in Mary.

But let us return to symbolic language generally to ascertain that all personal reality has symbolic character. Personal reality is contingent reality with transcendent significance, grounded in the paradoxical reality of body and soul, reassured and expanded in the analogy of nature and the supernatural. De Lubac once formulated: "Mary is truly a concrete-universal reality which is overabundant perfection containing the perfection of all

members of the Church."[53] If the symbol concretizes, it also transcends. One of its noblest functions is to nudge and prompt reconciliation between singularity and universality, between Mary of Galilee and Mary Queen of Heaven, or, in this case, between Mary, mother of the Lord and Mary, mother of the Church.

## B. The Ecclesiological Criterion

It was already mentioned that there exists a close relationship between Mary, Mother of the Church and ecclesiology in general, and the ecclesiology of a particular period of Church history. It could be said without exaggeration that the role of Mary adjusts to various types of ecclesiology. A personalized ecclesiology suggests the quasi-identification between Mary and Church; the absence of a noticeable profile of the Church allows Mary to move in and take over. If the Church projects itself as the *societas perfecta,* the role of Mary will be essentially that of a distributor of graces and mediatrix. The Mystical Body analogy offers Mary a mystagogical role, companionship for the people of God and presence among the many. John Paul II's "Pentecost Church" commissioned Mary's missionary charism, whereas Benedict XVI's eucharistic ecclesiology called upon Mary's personalizing and concretizing abilities. In a predominantly gubernatorial church, Mary plays a predominantly compensatory role, safeguarding the personal dimension and its Christocentric character. She will suggest and promote a sapiential reading of God's word, and practice reconciliatory skills.

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[53] Henri de Lubac, *Méditations sur l'Eglise* (2. ed., Paris, 1953), 273f.; also his *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 164.

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The examples listed here may give the impression that ecclesiology is always first and determines Mary's role in and for the Church. This may have been true for the conciliar option in favor of ecclesiotypical mariology. More recent developments in mariology and ecclesiology highlight the Mary-Church relationship and its importance for *communion* ecclesiology. John Paul II wrote: "In her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and every one in the Church, and embraces each and every one *through* the Church. In this sense Mary, Mother of the Church, is also the Church's model." [54] The intense personalist terminology used by the pope connects the Mary-Church relationship with communion ecclesiology. Indeed, communion ecclesiology is difficult to envisage without a personalist relationship between Mary and the Church, flowing from her union with Christ, and pointedly articulated in Paul VI's proclamation of Mary, *Mother of the Church.* [55] *Signum Magnum.* [56] *Marialis Cultus* [57] and *Redemptoris Mater* [58] reiterate and deepen the teaching of Vatican II which, in turn, is reassumed in the *Catechism*. Here, Mary, the spotless Bride, is *the* example of the Church's holiness. In this, the Marian dimension of the Church precedes its Petrine character. [59] The *Catechism* further presents Mary as the *exemplary realization* of the Church, her eschatological icon and preeminent sign of

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[54] RM, 47.

[55] Paul VI, Discourse, November 21, 1964; See CCC 963.

[56] SM, 1.

[57] MC, 28.

[58] RM, 24 and 25, among others.

[59] CCC, 773.

hope.[60] Thus, Mary typifies on a personal level the meaning and reality of *communio* ecclesiology.

What appears to characterize a situation of happy convergence between mariology and ecclesiology is, in fact, a rather isolated case. H. Rahner remarked already before the Council that mariology and ecclesiology needed reciprocal integration: "We have to teach again, he said, to see Mary in the Church, and the Church in Mary."[61] The Council implemented the first of these wishes: Mary was integrated in the Church. However, the reverse so far has not happened. We are still waiting for a convincing Marian ecclesiology.

## C. The Anthropological Link

Highlighting the anthropological link between Mary and Church is a way of opting in favor of a more explicit and patterned expression of the *perichoresis* between Mary, Church, *and* Jesus Christ. The ecclesiotypical mariology of Vatican II, which in fact was never only ecclesiotypical,[62] seemed to be an obstacle to the inclusion of the Mary-Church title. In fact, it was not, since the doctrine underlying it is amply present in the text of Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*. However, the understanding of this seems to have been lacking, since the intention of the

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[60] CCC, 951, 972.

[61] Hugo, Rahner, *Maria und die Kirche. Zehn Kapitel uber dal geistliche Leben* (Innsbruck, 1962[2]), 8-16.

[62] Attentive reading of *Lumen Gentium*, chap. 8, allows for three dimensions of Mary's mission: (1) Mary's active involvement in the salvific events, (2) her faith-journey toward the accomplished religious personality, and (3) her role as model and exemplar of the Church. This threefold systemic unity on behalf of the place of Mary at Vatican II highlights christotypical, eccleriotypical, and anthropological aspects.

Council was the integration of Mary in the Church, instead of a *perichoresis* of all, of Christ, Church, and Mary, to facilitate the formulation of the title at hand.

It would seem that a more explicitly stated anthropological qualification would favor not only the formulation but also the actualization of the title. If the "personal character" of Jesus Christ is not questioned, was never questioned, this was not similarly evident for Mary who, especially in christotypical mariology, was more function or role than human and person. Anthropological patterns endeavored to correct this lacuna. Although not always easy to ascertain as to origin and articulation, different strands of theological reflection converge in this current: the viewpoint of salvation history, that is, the linear concept of salvation (event, process); furthermore, the soteriological elements (Mary as redeemed creature) or aspects pertaining to the theology of grace (Mary fully graced); and, more recently, Mary engaged in a process of social and anthropological liberation. They span a wide variety of Mary's images,[63] from Romano Guardini's "Ideal of Faith," to Rahner's "Fully and Perfectly Redeemed Person," Müller's "Fully and Perfectly Graced One" and "Personal Summit of the Faithful," Schillebeeckx's quasi-replica of Rahner's "Perfectly and Fully Redeemed Person," Volk's "Model of Faith," Boff's "Eschatological Anticipation of the Feminine," and Gebara/Bingemer's re-reading "from the needs of our age." These various currents come closest to what might be called a Marian identity, in other words, a theological reflection on the person of Mary, either from the point of view of herself (her

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[63] Jan, Radkiewicz, *Auf der Suche nach einem mariologischen Grundprinzip. Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung uber die letzten hundert Jahre* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 1988), 293-300.

faith), the soteriological effects on her personality, the exemplary character of her redeemed person for the other faithful, or the rapport between concrete needs and her personality profile.

In particular, there are currents of Marian anthropology which could advantageously shape and activate the *perichoresis* between Jesus Christ, the Church, and Mary. There is on one hand Rahner's correspondence[64] anthropology, which sees in Mary the realization of the perfect Christian, the fully redeemed one, and the one fully present in salvation history. In Mary's person and life there exists perfect correspondence with Christ, and it is in this correspondence that lies her perfection. Rahner sees Mary as person in herself, but not separated from Christ, since it is in him that she finds perfection. Balthasar, on the other hand, focused on Mary's *mission.*[65] She is the servant of the Lord, totally dedicated to her Son and his mission, given to him in full obedience, faith, hope and charity. If Rahner's Mary follows a *monstrative* pattern of being, Balthasar's Mary highlights a more *performative* stance. Between the two theologians we have the combined profile which makes Mary Mother of the Church. Her personal perfection makes of her the eschatological icon of the Church. In her mission, Mary not only states her active relationship with the Church, but also at the same time her archetypical persona and ultimate model character. Both of these qualities lend Mary a certain superiority

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[64] K. Riesenhuber, *Maria im theologischen Verständnis von Karl Barth und Karl Rahner* (Herder, 1973), 64-125; K. Rahner, *Grundkurs des Glaubens. Einfuhrung in hen Begriff des Christentums* (Freiburg, 1977); *Marienlexikon* 5 (1993): "Rahner, Karl."

[65] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik II, 2. Die Personen in Christus* (Einsiedeln, 1978), 283-360.

over the Church but highlight the relational characteristics that exist between the two of them.

Anthropology has its very special impact on the Church herself. It restores the personal and relational characteristics of the Church as we can observe them in some of the more typical ecclesiologies of the twentieth century (e.g., the *Mystici Corporis* ecclesiology, the people of God, and *communio* ecclesiology). Both community and individuals are carriers of relationality. "A correct vision of man . . . must proceed from a relationship in which each one remains a free person and is joined to the other precisely as such. It must be a doctrine of relationship and seek a type of relationship that is not a means-end relation but the self-giving of persons."[66] Retracing the history of the concept of person, Ratzinger finds the origin in theology and identifies the concept as "product of Christian theology." The notion of person has Trinitarian roots, and comes into its own thanks to Christology. In other words, the concept refers to God and describes him as dialogical being. "God [is] the being that lives in the word and consists of the word as 'I' and 'You' and 'We.'"[67] Ratzinger insists: "In God, person means relation … In God, person is the pure relativity of being turned toward the other, it does not lie on the level of substance—the substance is one—but on the level of dialogical reality, of relativity toward the other."[68] Realized in its entirety only in God, the "phenomenon of complete relativity … indicates the

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[66] Joseph Ratzinger, "Freedom and Liberation: The Anthropological Vision of the Instruction 'Libertatis Conscientia,'" *Communio* 14 (Spring 1987): 61.

[67] Joseph Ratzinger, "Retrieving the Tradition: Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990): 443.

[68] Ratzinger, "Retrieving the Tradition," 444.

direction of all personal being." In Jesus Christ, the relativity becomes "'being from someone and toward someone,' the absolute openness of existence without any reservation of what is merely and properly one's own."[69]

## IV. THE MANY CHALLENGES

### A. What Kind of Mother?

We find a beautiful theological characterization of Mary's motherhood in Ratzinger's *Journey towards Easter*, the retreat he gave at the Vatican in 1987: "She [Mary] in a certain sense set aside whatever in her life was personal, so as to be uniquely at the disposal of the Son, and it is precisely in this that Mary realized her personality."[70] Speaking of the correlation of Mary and the Church, their shared mystery, he further remarks speaking of both: "We should adopt the symbol of the fertile soil, we should become people of hope, harvesting their own inner lives, persons who, deep within their prayer, their longing and their faith, make room for growth."[71] There are many ways to identify motherhood, either with apprehension and fear as suggested by the Lilith-complex, or to join the call for the return of the mother to our societies with some contemporary authors.[72]

We would like to sketch two brief profiles of the Mother of the Church, echoing hopefully some particular needs of the contemporary Church. Indeed, if the *Mater Ecclesiae* title is not

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[69] Ratzinger, "Retrieving the Tradition," 445 and 446.

[70] Joseph Ratzinger, *Journey towards Easter: Retreat Given in the Vatican in the Presence of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 13.

[71] Ratzinger, *Journey*, 32.

[72] A. Harvey, *The Return of the Mother* (New York: Penguin/Putnam Inc., 200l), esp. 435f.

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filled with a sufficiently personalized content, the title remains a purely representational construct. But, as we know, representations do not live. As Mother of the Church, Mary is both a universal and local mother, notwithstanding the mostly salutary tensions existing between the two poles.

## 1. Mother of Truth and Love

In *Lumen Gentium* (65) we read: "Mary, in a way, unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of faith." The same article, in a similar literary construction speaks of Mary as model of virtues: "And so they [faithful] turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues." Re-echoing and shining are eminently aesthetic categories. They are a way of hailing Mary's *mediation*. Motherhood primarily has mediating, not causal functions. Biblical sources suggest that a mother who brings forth a child does not cause it. Neither does the father. God alone is creator of individual life, mediated by man and woman. Motherhood is comparable to a personal or personalized space in which God is able to create new life. Thus, the virgin birth points to the transcendence of the author of creation. Jesus Christ is not made, he is *egeneto*, a constant referral to the descendance from God. Article 65 illustrates the eminently *mediating* character of Mary. What she projects and passes on is not hers; it is entirely God's. Mediation does not have a primarily causal function. It has social and relational qualities, which jell in Mary's motherly care for Church and the faithful. As mother of God, Mary becomes cause of the Church, but in a mediating role. There is ultimately only one source and one cause of mediation, Jesus Christ.

As the one who re-echoes the most important doctrines of faith, Mary mediates what made her who or what she is. Her mediation is a personal one, but it has its sole source in God. Mary's person is transparent enough to God, for him to make

visible and real the very center of his self-communication in Revelation. All this amounts to the dialectics of receiving and giving, a deeply maternal endeavor.

As article 65 aptly states, the mediation of both, a truth fashioned in personal experience and assimilation, is not an academic exercise, but the origin and cause of Mary's shining as model of virtues. It is the fruit of a previous and ongoing personal appropriation by God and Mary's intimacy with and assimilation of God's love.

## 2. Mother of Christ's Disciples

Mary, Mother of the Church, mediates both *truth* and *love*. On a different level, and closer to the immediate concerns of the Church, Mary is and should be the Mother of Christ's *disciples*. Biblical sources of Mary's motherhood of the Church concentrate mainly on Incarnation and Passion, trying to capture motherhood in its most genuine experience as physical, and subsequently, a spiritual reality. However, there are other dimensions of receiving and giving. One of those is particularly appropriate for today's Church. Mary's Church needs disciples. It is surprising that the Cana pericope appears only rarely in commentaries regarding Mary's motherhood of the Church. However, as is plainly apparent, the Church needs disciples to carry on with the mission of salvation." In the account of Cana there is a discreet suggestion of Mary's "spiritual motherhood" in relation to the new people of God. In biblical tradition "Daughter Zion" is frequently represented in a maternal role, one very nicely articulated in Psalm 86 (87) verse 5— "And of

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Zion it shall be said, 'This one and that one were born in her.'"[73] Shining forth truth and generating disciples are innermost related motherly roles. The first reconnects with origin and the present, the second prepares and warrants the future. In different ways, these roles ascertain continuity.

## B. Mother of the Global Church

Ever since the Council of Jerusalem in 50 AD, the Catholic Church has been a global player, sometimes as a pro-active and spiritually motivated leader, at other times as a follower and victim of other global players. At a time when theology seems to be actively resonating with the theme of globalization, it would be useful to remember that the mother of the Church is mother of the global Church. It is the role of the mother—a role among others—to warrant unity, to be a reconciler, and a source of creative inspiration. Mary, Mother of the Global Church plays a role in a world guided by *interculturalism* instead of only multiculturalism.[74] At the same time, she should be called upon to convey the reality, the salvific reality, of the "new being" understood as *imago Dei* to the global world. In the first case, that of interculturalism, her name and person can be a source of spiritual and human enrichment. In the second case, Mary's presence warrants a global and concrete understanding of the human person.

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[73] Ignace de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant* (New York: Alba House, 1992), 249.

[74] Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (Vatican City, 2013), esp. 29-44.

## 1. The Challenge of Interculturalism

The time of inculturation seems to have reached its term. Social anthropology has turned the page and operates from a new vantage point, from globalization and its corollary of "interculturalism." The cultures of the global village are connected because of migration, the internet, and the digital culture. The question raised is this: "How does one move from the simple juxtaposition of cultures called 'multiculturalism,' in order to enter a culture of relationships which could be able to transform itself into a peaceful interculturalism?"[75]

This new perspective implies a new sense of partnership and equality between old and new churches. Summarizing some recent studies about Marian inculturation, we would like to suggest for the present of the universal church four major cultural and theological images of Mary. We mention the vitalist image of Africa. Mary embodies the holy vitalism as mother and guardian of life on this continent. The Marian figure of the Asian Christian culture conveys a strong ecumenical character. She is a highly spiritual figure inviting the communion of spirits, pointing to unity beyond diversity, and preparing reconciliation and communion in the spiritual life. Mary of Latin America is a symbol of sacrificial love (Mother of Sorrows), with a strong incarnational purpose (*Magnificat*). She embodies hope, change and social justice. She symbolizes the dawn of a better future. Some time ago, contemporary North Atlantic culture (Western Europe and the USA) discovered Mary as one of us: a sister

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[75] Ibid, General Introduction, with a note that this document is to be understood as "a means of dialogue and reflection to all who are concerned for the education of the whole person, for the building up of a peaceful society marked by solidarity!"

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figure, a companion on our pilgrimage to God, our *alter ego*, and the figurehead of many causes.[76]

Culture, as we know, is widely stereotypical. It has a typifying tendency and character, but it is in these generalizing descriptions that we find the creative and inspirational moments of a future and fruitful *intercultural* dialogue. There is no reason why the foundational image of Mary should not be enriched by Indian and African Christians.

## 2. The Gift of a New Being to the Global World

Redemption is not fully described in the notion of grace. Redemption offers a new look on the whole person and its various dimensions. We would like to mention some of these dimensions, basing our thoughts on the recent revival of interest in the *imago Dei* theology.[77] We share with Mary in the image and likeness with God. What we lack in perfection, we compensate in equality, being creatures of God one and the same with Mary in the order of being. With her we share in the human and anthropological benefits of our redeemed human condition. In Mary we have the personalized realization of the anthropological platform for a global world.

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[76] These are some of the conclusions that the authors arrived at after study, exchange, and ongoing dialogue with representatives of the diverse cultures mentioned.

[77] Documented in particular in: International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God* (2004).

We will limit ourselves to an enumeration of these characteristics, developing only one of them. [78] Christian perception of human reality opens our understanding to an analogical perception of reality, an optimistic understanding of the human person, the axiological concept of history, a resolute eschatological theology, an ontological concept of ethics, and a transformative cultural model. One of the core realities of Christian anthropology is the optimistic understanding of the human person. Indeed, one of the corollaries of the *imago Dei* theology is an *optimistic* understanding of the human person, not least but most importantly because of "our transformation into the image of Christ."[79] The positive view of human beings has profoundly marked Catholic culture, culminating ultimately in its secularized form as human rights for every human being.[80] Also important in this context is the missionary dynamism triggered and indefatigably sustained by this positive and optimistic view of the person for himself/herself, in relation to others and to God. Mary is the star example not only for the personal value of her person (Immaculate Conception), but also for her own perception of human existence as seen in the Magnificat and the practical consequences thereof in the "pro

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[78] For a more complete development of these characteristics see: J. Roten, "From Gatherer to Sender: Plaidoyer for a New Marian Dynamism*," EphMar* 64, fasc. 2 (Jul.-Sept. 2014): 207-210.

[79] See *Communion and Stewardship,* "5. Imago Dei and Imago Christi," 52: "For it is Jesus Christ who reveals to man the fullness of [his] being, in its original nature, in its final consummation, and in its present reality."

[80] *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (10 December 1948). " In his address to the U.N. on October 5, 1995, John Paul II called the *Declaration* "one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time."

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nobis" of Jesus Christ.[81] Thus, Mary, mother of the global Church, is a truly Catholic Mary, attracting attention to Christian essentials on the one hand, and also, as a global Madonna, leading us to greater existential Catholicity.

## C. A Marian Church?

What is in a title? Does *Mater Ecclesiae* inaugurate what some hope to be a Marian Church? There have been in the past some timid initiatives and calls for a Marian Church.[82] Ever since Balthasar coined the doublet of the Petrine and Marian Church, comparisons flourished. They centered on the opposition of mind vs. heart, on the individual vs. collectivity, on the bureaucratic vs. the empathetic, the impersonal vs. the personal perception in the Church. Now, is it not true that if Mary is Mother of the Church she would have to deal with all of these antagonisms, hopefully in order to bring them all under her merciful mantle? A mother never rejects any of her children; they are all dear to her, the lame as well as the blind.

However, there are personal characteristics of Our Lady that have always had a salutary impact on the faithful, and were able

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[81] David J. Norman, "Mary-Church as the Re-Presentation of the Kenosis of Christ according to Hans Urs von Balthasar" (Edmonton, Alberta, 1982. Newman Theological College; Thesis for Master of Theology), 238f.

[82] Balthasar's distinction between Petrine and Marian Church may be considered an important impetus for the discussion about the Marian Church. Both Peter and Mary are in a sense co-extensive with the Church, Mary in her motherliness and Peter as representative of the Church in his person. Yet Mary precedes Peter with her Yes, and the form of her faith serves as the model of all being and acting of the Church. Balthasar concludes: "For both these reasons the Petrine universality is subject to the formative influence of the Marian, but not vice versa" (*The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986], 206).

to offer transformative power for the Church at large. Let me mention six of them.

1. Mary represents a major portion of the Church's *memory*.[83] Memory is important as we know. It is, up to a point, the stalwartness of our identity, of our Christian and ecclesial identity. Mary is the guardian of our genetic code as Christian. In her and through her we remember with joy who we are and where we come from. This the *narrative* aspect of Mary's charism as mother of the Church, a lifeline in the valley of tears, and a hymn of joy for the heart that remembers.

2. More often than not, a mother is cause of admiration, steeped and grounded in life-giving affection.[84] Helpless children and wizened adults emulate and imitate their mothers. Mary, Mother of the Church, is also our eschatological icon, the accomplished Christian in glory, and the blueprint for the Church *in via*.[85] We see in Mary the *iconic* mother, perfection to be held and cherished, and ways to contemplate the goal of our existence. Mother Mary reminds the Church that she is in this world but not of this world. It is the nature of icons to be a presence and not only a message.[86] Marian meditation

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[83] The *memoria passionis, mortiset resurrectionis Jesu Christi* is and remains central to the very self-understanding and identity of Christian existence. It comes as no surprise that theological reflection about Mary is entirely dependent on and oriented toward it. Cf. Walter Brennan*, The Sacred Memory of Mary* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 78-79.

[84] J. Roten, "The Virgin Mary as Known by Youth … ," MS 45 (1994): 182s.

[85] CCC, 972s.

[86] Indeed, "image and word illuminate each other." See: CCC, 1160.

and prayer have here their place, a way to ponder the eschatological orientation of our lives.

3. Being the guardian of life, a mother has an eye for essentials. Similarly, Mary is centered on the essential, a condition sine qua non to be a *prophet*. For Ratzinger, prophetism is closely related to being centered on what is interior and essential. Mary is a true prophet "because in her everything tends from the periphery to the essential and the interior."[87] Mary is the listener of the Living Word, receiving it in her heart, maturing it before witnessing to the truth received and assimilated. Here lies the source and the beginning of Mary's missionary charism, conveying one of the noblest tasks of the Mother of the Church.

4. Recent theology has rediscovered the importance and reality of the mystagogical vocation of the Church,[88] the patient and progressive initiation into the mysteries of God and of the Church, a way to being formed in the image of God, and a personal, even spousal, union with him. Mary is a perfect model for the Church's mystagogical vocation, being herself the result of God's pedagogy to center her in the innermost depth of his love.

5. Mary is a gatherer and sender.[89] Her sympathy is with the poor. She raises her voice, a critical voice, against

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[87] J. Roten, "Mary- 'Personal Concretization of the Church,'" MS 57 (2006): 303.

[88] J. Roten, "Marie, éducatrice de la prière. Approche théologique," *Etudes Mariales* (Actes de la 70e session de SFEM, 2014): 48. See also S. De Fiores, *Maria: Nuovissimo dizionario* (3 vols.; Bologna: EDB, 2006-2008), 1:656-657.

[89] J. Roten, "From Gatherer to Sender … ," EphMar 64 (2014): 193-214.

social injustice. Mary has a vocation of solidarity. Receiving the name of spiritual mother at the foot of the Cross, she gathers in solidarity with the disciples in the Upper Room, and becomes the woman of Pentecost.[90] Christian spirituality is a spirituality of communion. It is liturgical and apostolic, personal also but integrated in the Communion of Saints. Her *social* charism invites us to her sanctuary, and leads people to the hotspots of human misery. It should be added here, that as representative of the universal maternal figure, Mary possesses also an eminently cultural gift to reach out to people of all walks of life.[91]

6. A Marian Church will have to offer and extend a *therapeutic*[92] or healing hand that reflects Pope Francis' spirituality of encounter, but there is more to it. In her life, Mary has overcome and mastered the inevitable dichotomies of human life: the tension between faith and reason, justice and love, the world and God, between what we now call theology and spirituality. Much of what we recognize as her therapeutic charism is in fact the ability to restore unity in the person, thanks to the

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[90] J. Ratzinger/ H. Urs von Balthasar, "Il segno della Donna. Introduzione all'enciclica Redemptoris Mater," in *Maria, il Si di Dio all'uomo* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1987), 5-37.

[91] J. Roten, "Mary and the Multicultural Challenges," in *Mariologia a tempore concilii Vaticani II. Receptio, ratio, et prospectus* (Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani Internationalis (Rome, 2012, 2013), 358s.

[92] Andrew Harvey, "Mary Our Mother," in *The Return of the Mother* (New York: J. P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001), 339f.

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generous gift of self. Indeed, the return to the mother is
always a healing experience.

In conclusion: Mary presents the Church with the "measure of
Jesus Christ," understood both as living reality and model. It is
here that the Marian Church begins and ends.

### D. Mary, the Church and the Holy Spirit

Mary's motherhood of the Church raises the question of the
practical, I am tempted to say the functional, perichoresis
between Mary, the Church, and the Spirit always present. We
attribute to Mary a permanent role and presence in the Church's
activities, and the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, can
never be absent. Is there a division of labor between these three,
and, if yes, how can it be labeled? Would it be accurate to see in
Mary the ultimate facilitator of the Church's activity and the
Spirit's presence?[93]

In what ways and how would Mary facilitate? Could it be
said that Mary facilitates the combined action of the Spirit and
the Church? The direct and efficient causality of our constitution
and growth in the spiritual life is the Church's sacramental
activity; she gives us life in the Spirit and cares for it, principally
through the liturgy. The Spirit, being the Spirit of Christ,
supports the Church's action, directs and critiques it, and has the
ultimate transformative power to fashion the New Creation of
which we are a part.

Thus, could we say that Mary personalizes the Church's
action and concretizes the Spirit's active presence? Mary, as
person, is a constant reminder that our life in Christ depends on
the Church and the Spirit. In her, we gather and treasure love,

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[93] J. Roten, "How Can Spirituality be Marian?" MS 52 (2001): 38-39.

trust, and commitment to the Church. Mary opens our hearts to the Church's "all-embracing motherhood,"[94] and, at the same time, she steels our resolve to participate in her task of evangelization. She personalizes our relationship to the Church, and so makes us receptive to her salvific action. Furthermore, Mary has been called the masterpiece of the Spirit.[95] In her, the elusive Spirit has taken form and spiritual excellence. She is also a conductor of the Spirit's energy, of his light and warmth, attracting and radiating it. Thus, should we call her the ultimate facilitator of our spiritual life? The advantage of this approach would be to avoid any impression of a parallel track of salvation, any suggestion of a special and esoteric Christian tradition for the initiated few. At the same time, it would re-center the person and role of Mary as a link between the Church, the Spirit, and the individual Christian.[96]

To be present and active in history, the Spirit "depends," so to speak, on sensible forms. Mary was one of these forms—after Christ, the most perfect realization of the Spirit—the Spirit's masterpiece. The Spirit owes Mary his visibility, one of his "incarnations"; where God becomes present and visible, there is beauty. Likewise, it is only in the Spirit that Mary has a face— meaning not only visibility but also and (primarily) a personal identity. Whatever Mary's face, it would be forever forgotten had it not been modeled by the hand of the Spirit to match and reflect God's plans of self-revelation. Icon painters attest the

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[94] Ibid., 38, n. 67: "This is a favored expression of the author [Balthasar], one used in many of his writings."

[95] CCC, 722.

[96] Roten, "How Can Spirituality be Marian?" 39.

authorship of their art to the Spirit. Where the hand of God touches a human being, there again is beauty.[97]

## E. Mary's Role as Mother of the Church: A Critical Function Implied

We recognize in Mary the living memory of the Church and a powerful spiritual benchmark as eschatological icon. Very early on, Mary was hailed as the one who stood tall and strong to deflect heresies. This is a time to remember her critical function, not least because she unites in her person the full treasure of our faith and reflects it. *Lumen Gentium,* 65, is one of the most beautiful expressions of Mary's mediation. A true mother will always be attentive to protect the life of her sons and daughters.

Here are some of the cornerstones and capstones that hold the edifice of the Church together and protect it.

1. The singular and definitive character of the Incarnation;

2. The theonomic character of revelation, where God acts first, out of his own volition, in absolute free self-communication;

3. The uncontrovertible law of mediation, where God entrusts himself to humanity in an endless sequence of events—through his own Son, to Mary, the Church, in the Spirit;

4. The fundamental law of freedom coupled with the law of love, making human life a gift of God to be treasured and shared;

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[97] CCC, 721-726.

5. Not to be forgotten, the fundamentally integrative character of Christianity, where nothing is left out—neither body nor soul, individual nor social reality, man nor woman, time nor eternity.[98]

## F. The Grace of Mary

The title of "Mary, Mother of the Church" suggests and requests new attention to mediation and related realities, such as her spiritual maternity and the theology of grace. Whereas certain quarters of the Church have been diligently exploring the many ramifications of Mary's mediation, other quarters have kept silent and looked the other way. It would seem appropriate to engage in a new dialogue about Mary's active presence in salvation history. What are the findings and new certitudes of the Coredemption movement? How do we think and speak today about the topics that comprised mariology almost one hundred years ago? The primary object of such dialogue is not a new dogma at-all-cost, but a deeper and more mature understanding of the various players of salvation history and, in a special way, of Mary.

One of the key issues of these explanations would have to deal with the theology of grace and its correlation with Mary's mediation. Mary's grace is the grace of the Incarnation. "The Virgin Mary received this fullness of grace, so that she who is full of grace might be closest to the author of grace, so close, that she in giving birth to him might give it, pass it on to everybody."[99] In a Christological perspective, therefore, Mary

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[98] J. Roten, "Marie, 'Matrice de l'Identité Ecclésiale'. Le rôle de la Vierge dans l'évangélisation," *Marianum* 73 (2011): 326.

[99] STh. III, 27, a.5.

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can be called *Mediatrix omnium gratiarum*. As Mother of the Church and its communication of grace to all, she is spiritually the maternal mediatrix of grace to all. [100] The grace of incarnation is not limited to a one-time event. It leads to a permanent participation and personal accentuation. Recent inroads in a revised and deepened understanding of grace point out the danger of a reification of grace and its objectivization outside of an existential context. On the contrary, grace is an essentially relational reality. Ratzinger formulates this as follows: "In fact, grace is a relational concept: it does not express something about a characteristic or quality of a subject, but says something about the relationship between I and Thou, between God and man … You are full of grace could therefore be translated also as: You are filled with the Holy Spirit. You are in vital relationship with God."[101] The theology of grace centers on the concept of auto-communication of God in Jesus Christ. God makes of Mary a presence of himself, a sacramental presence, a visible and active one. We find here, among others, the approach to grace of what was called at one time the *nouvelle théologie,* which begins with God and his self-revelation as Trinity in the event of Christ, as both fulfilling every human aspiration and yet totally unexpected and incomparable.[102]

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[100] Gloria Falcao Dodd, *The Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Grace: History and Theology of the Movement for a Dogmatic Definition from 1896 to 1964* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2012), 334.

[101] J. Roten, "Mary—'Personal Concretization of the Church,'" 306.

[102] H. Boersma, "Nature and the Supernatural in *La Nouvelle Theologie*: The Recovery of a Sacramental Mindset," *New Blackfriars,* 93, no. 1043 (January 2012): 34-46.

The universal character of Mary's mediation is important, but it does not specify the nature and content of mediation: Grace. Could grace be called the transformative intimacy with the revealing Christ? Should grace be formulated in terms of actional language—namely, as faith, hope, charity, obedience? Is grace best expressed in terms of sacramental sensitivity and eschatological orientation, that is, as charity and holiness?[103] Furthermore, grace received and mediated is not just grace received. Reception, harboring and cherishing, imprints a new stamp on the grace received. It bears the imprint of the receiver, not a new quality but a new modality. It gives the unchanged grace aspects of a new personalization, the fruits of the *admirabile commercium* between God and the human person.

## Conclusion

This title *Mater Ecclesiae* is still another visible memorial in honor of Paul VI's Marian devotion and love. It was his conviction that as Christians we are called to be Marian: "Se vogliamo essere Cristiani," he said in 1970, "dobbiamo essere mariani."[104] This personal conviction may have been the real reason for his magisterial initiative to give the Church the title of "Mary, Mother of the Church."

Marian titles are legion and present a great variety as to origin, content, and dissemination.[105] They can be very sharp

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[103] John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January, 2001), 30f. and 42f.

[104] Paul VI: "Se vogliamo essere Curistiani, dobbiamo essere mariani" (at the Shrine of O. L. of Bonaria in Cagliari, April 24, 1970).

[105] The website *All About Mary* of the International Marian Research Institute, under "Sources of Titles," explains how titles come about, gives various categories of titles, and examines their ecclesial status.

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and final when dealing with doctrinal issues. They can be emotionally charged and of a quasi-sacramental value when dealing with the history and destiny of peoples and their culture. In most of the historical situations that generated them, Marian titles were the result of a personal and/or collective religious experience, and thus represent a *verbum abbreviatum,* [106] punctuating salvation history in its quest for visibility and memory.

Titles in many ways represent what we might call a hip-pocket spirituality, a *ferverino* for the road, and a little icon to hold, to cherish, and to remember. Titles are names, mostly. A name is a declaration of love, for those who understand and are committed. In the end, titles are always a call to action in order to take into the future what these titles remember and cherish of the past. Every title of Mary is framed by her person—mother always, but also sister. As Bernard of Clairvaux reminds us, the Mother and her power is always there to be drawn on in love's name:

> When you follow Her you do not take a wrong turn.
> When you pray to Her you do not lose hope.
> When She occupies your mind, you are sheltered from error.
> When She holds you up, you cannot fall.
> When She protects you, you do not fear.
> When She leads you forward, you do not get exhausted.
> When Her star shines on you, you arrive at the harbor of freedom.[107]

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[106] LG, chap. 8, 65, presents Mary as the one who "unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith." Thus, she is synthesis and concentration, therefore also abbreviation, of the essentials of our faith.

[107] Related to the famous "respice stellam"; see Hom. IV, *Super Missus est* (PL 183:55-88).

But let us return to *Mater Ecclesiae*, and conclude with Paul VI's prayer to the Mother of the Church:

> O Mary
> look upon the Church …
> gathered about you to thank you
> and to celebrate you as their Mystical Mother.
> We ask you now
> that we may be made worthy of honoring you
> because of who you are
> and because of what you do
> in the wondrous and loving plan of salvation.
> Grant that we may praise you,
> O holy Virgin!
> May your most human voice,
> O most beautiful of virgins,
> O most worthy of mothers,
> O blessed among women,
> invite the world to turn its eyes
> toward the life that is the light of human beings,
> toward you who are the precursor-lamp of Christ,
> Who is the sole and the highest Light of the world.[108]

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Father Johann G. Roten, SM, is a Marianist priest, a faculty member of the International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton. As the Director of Research and Special Programs for the Marian Library/IMRI, he is closely involved with the exhibits and activities of the Art Gallery and Crèche Museum there.

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[108] AAS 56 (1964): 1014f.

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