

## Pope John Paul II and Chiara Lubich: Each in Their Own Way Highlighting the Church's Marian Profile

Occasionally, when they would meet, Pope John Paul would quip to Chiara Lubich “you’re older than me!” It was true – but just by a few months. She was born on 22 January 1920 in Trent, Italy, and he on 18 May 1920 in Wadowice, Poland. Their paths would cross many years later when both had, by then, a particularly developed understanding of Mary, the Mother of God, and of her place in the life of the members of the Church. In this short article, I propose to sketch briefly some of the main points of their spiritual doctrine regarding Mary. More specifically I want to highlight the theme of the Marian profile of the Church that both held as very significant and both spoke about to one another. Each in their own way, highlighted the Church’s Marian profile.

### Pope John Paul II

When Karol Wojtyła became Pope in 1978, Marian devotion in the Catholic Church was at a low ebb. But the Pope from Poland proceeded to deliver a staggering number of Marian sermons and prayers, weekly Angelus messages and encyclicals dedicated to Marian themes. It reflected a life-long devotion to Mary.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a general introduction, see Brendan Leahy, *Believe in Love: The Life, Ministry and Teachings of John Paul II* (Dublin: Veritas, 2011) and “Totus Tuus: The Mariology of John Paul II,” in William Oddie, ed., *John Paul the Great: Maker of the Post-conciliar Church* (London: CTS, 2003), 69-94.

He grew up admiring the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in his parish church of Wadowice. His parents brought him on frequent pilgrimages to the shrine of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. Visits to the shrine of Jasna Góra with its Black Madonna in Czestochowa, the greatest Marian shrine in Poland, were also important and it was to this shrine that his father took the nine-year-old boy when his mother died. As a teenager he became a member of a young people's "Living Rosary" group that prayed for peace and liberation. However, having experienced something of a minor crisis – would Mary detract from the place due to Jesus in his life? – Karol Wojtyła discovered the classic work of St Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716), *A Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*.

In his 1994 book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, referring to the motto he took as a bishop and then incorporated into the Papal crest ('Totus Tuus', 'Totally Yours'), he provided an autobiographical summary of the early stage of his life, including his discovery of de Monfort, all of which led directly to the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris mater* (1987) and the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (1988):

*Totus Tuus*. This phrase is not only an expression of piety, or simply an expression of devotion. It is more. During the Second World War, while I was employed as a factory worker, I came to be attracted to Marian devotion ... Thanks to Saint Louis of Montfort, I came to understand that true devotion to the Mother of God is actually Christocentric, indeed, it is very profoundly rooted in the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption ... This mature form of devotion to the Mother of God has stayed with me over the years, bearing fruit in ... *Redemptoris mater* and *Mulieris dignitatem*.<sup>2</sup>

The late American theologian and Cardinal, Avery Dulles, recognised the depths of Pope John Paul II's Mariology when he commented that "it would be a mistake to think of Karol Wojtyła's attachment to Mary as the fruit of sentimentality. On the contrary, he has a deep theological and spiritual understanding of Mary's central place in the whole plan of salvation that centres in Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

In reflecting on the identity of Mary, Pope John Paul read the Bible as a totality and traced how the female line of the history of salvation leads to Mary.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994), 212-213.

<sup>3</sup> Avery Dulles, "Mary at the Dawn of the New Millennium," *America* 178 (March 1998): 8-19, here p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance, The Apostolic Letter on the Dignity of Women *Mulieris dignitatem* (15 August, 1988), nn.3, 11 and 30.

He viewed Mary as *The Woman*, pre-announced by the words of the “First Gospel” found in the Book of Genesis (Gen 3:15) and shown in eschatological perspective as the “woman clothed in sun” in the Book of Revelation (12:1). In his Apostolic Letter on the dignity of woman, he writes,

Mary means, in a sense, a going beyond the limit spoken of in the Book of Genesis (3:16) and a return to that “beginning” in which one finds the “woman” as she was intended to be in creation, and therefore in the eternal mind of God: in the bosom of the Most Holy Trinity.<sup>5</sup>

The particular aspect Pope John Paul underlined was Mary’s faith. The renowned Italian Mariologist Stefano De Fiores (1933-2012), pointed out that the way Pope John Paul II highlighted Mary’s faith meets the dilemma of contemporary Mariology in that it both responds to certain feminist demands to recognise Mary as a centre of decision and responsibility, while at the same time attentive to the Protestant concern to depict Mary as subordinate to Christ, the one Mediator.<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting on Mary’s “pilgrimage of faith” as the “first disciple of her Son,”<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul often echoed Elizabeth’s words: “Blessed is she who believed” (Lk 1:45). Commenting on the prominent place given to Mary’s faith in the encyclical *Redemptoris mater*, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) remarks: “Perhaps never before in Mariology has this been done with such decisiveness.”<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger adds that the encyclical “turns into a catechesis about faith.”<sup>9</sup>

As a woman of faith, Mary let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit. We see this not only at the Annunciation (Lk 1:35) but throughout her life. One indication of the importance Pope John Paul ascribes to Mary’s relationship with the Holy Spirit is the fact that he mentions this bond over forty times in *Redemptoris mater*.<sup>10</sup>

The picture of Mary that John Paul II presents is of a real person, close to us. Her special position in God’s plan, her link with the Spirit and her faith did

<sup>5</sup> *Mulieris dignitatem*, n.11.

<sup>6</sup> Stefano De Fiores, *Maria nella teologia contemporanea* (Rome: Centro Mariano Monfortano, 1991), 657-568.

<sup>7</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris mater* (25 March 1987), n.20.

<sup>8</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Mary: God’s Yes to Man. John Paul’s Encyclical ‘Redemptoris mater’*. Introduction by Cardinal Ratzinger and Commentary by Hans Urs von Balthasar (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 165-167.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>10</sup> See also the Encyclical Letter by Pope John Paul II on the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, *Dominum et vivificantem* (18 May 1986), nn.49, 51 and 66.

not exempt her from travelling the ups and downs of the spiritual journey of discipleship. In describing this journey, John Paul avoids what de Fiores calls *Mariological monophysitism*, focusing on her divine privileges.<sup>11</sup> Rather he emphasises Mary's humanity. And it is in this light that Pope John Paul proposed the relevancy of Mary's faith journey, the "Way of Mary," as he calls it, for all who want to follow Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Following de Montfort's invitation, John Paul also suggests we cast ourselves into the "mould" of Mary as a way of progressing in our spiritual life. She is, after all, in John Paul's words, *in some way* the first "tabernacle" in history.<sup>13</sup>

Among the many biblical meditations offered by the Pope, one topic comes up repeatedly: Mary's experience at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25). It is the moment when she who had co-operated all the way along Jesus' mission now shares in the shocking mystery of his *kenosis*, his self-emptying: "This is perhaps the deepest kenosis of faith in human history."<sup>14</sup> She lived this kenosis, co-operating with Christ by letting him go. But it is at this moment that the dying Jesus entrusted Mary to John, and John (representing humanity) to Mary thus bestowing upon her a new, expanded and universal motherhood (Jn 19:25-27).<sup>15</sup>

## Chiara Lubich

Growing up in Trent, Northern Italy, Chiara Lubich (hereafter simply called *Chiara*, as she was known worldwide) would have experienced a deeply-rooted Marian piety with its typical expressions such as the Rosary and the May altar, the flowers of Mary and Marian novenas. So, it is somewhat surprising that in the first years of the Focolare Movement, Mary was not referred to often. Indeed, in 1947, when someone asked why she didn't speak about Mary, Chiara replied:

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<sup>11</sup> De Fiores, *Maria*, 568.

<sup>12</sup> See John Paul II, Apostolic Letter on the Rosary, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (16 October 2002), n.24.

<sup>13</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), n.55. (Of course, the term *tabernacle*, i.e. tent, has to be understood in its Old Testament meaning, referring to the place identified with the Lord's presence or *shekinah*. It would be, however, theologically awkward to use – with reference to Mary – the term *tabernacle*, meaning the place in Catholic churches and chapels where the Eucharist is reserved for adoration or for communion outside Mass. The Eucharist is the glorified body of the Risen Lord, and so it would be theologically very imprecise to speak of the Eucharist in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In fact, Pope John Paul II is careful to affirm in paragraph 55 of the mentioned encyclical that at the Incarnation, Mary "became *in some way* a 'tabernacle.'" *Note by the co-editors.*)

<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris mater*, n.18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, n.23.

“Mary is the door that leads us to God. A door is not a door if it does not open to let you pass through.”<sup>16</sup>

As the years advanced, however, in reflecting on the history of the Movement, Chiara and her companions understood how the Holy Spirit had formed the first members of the Movement with the same “educational strategy” that the Spirit used with the Church – leaving Mary initially in the background while highlighting the one who has to have first place – her Son, who is God.

Mary, the Mother of God, was to emerge greatly in Chiara’s spiritual doctrine from the summer of 1949 onwards. The years 1949-1951 can be considered a particular spiritual or mystical experience of light and life in the Movement, a foundational luminous stage (subsequently called “Paradise ’49”) during which Chiara and her companions came to a new understanding of Mary, one in accord with their communitarian spirituality that was taking shape.<sup>17</sup>

Without going into detail here, it is sufficient to say that the 1949 communitarian mystical experience of God brought them to understand, in a wholly new way, some of the great and perennial truths of our faith, such as God-Trinity and the mystery of Jesus crucified and Forsaken, Universal Redeemer. Immersed in that experience, Chiara’s understanding of Mary underwent a qualitative leap forward. This mystical experience was to become Mary’s “official entrance” into the Movement and Mary was, from then on, to take up an important place in Chiara’s thought and life experience. Rowan Williams, formerly the Archbishop of Canterbury, writes that

There will be some non-Roman Catholic readers who find themselves surprised, even shocked, by the central importance of Mary in Chiara’s exposition. But she makes it absolutely clear why this is so: we have, she says, too often approached Mary as if she were not herself a disciple – the first “follower” of Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

In her spiritual doctrine there is a profound link between Mary and the Word of God.<sup>19</sup> If Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God, writes Chiara, Mary is the Word of God *lived*. She is all “clothed” in the Word of God, imbued with the Word. And in this she is a model for each Christian, called to “repeat” Christ, the Truth, the Word, with the personality God has given to each of us. Obviously, this line of thought is significant for ecumenism.

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<sup>16</sup> Chiara Lubich, *Mary: Flower of Humanity* (London: New City, 2017), 29.

<sup>17</sup> For a general introduction to her thought and writings, see Michel Vandeleene, ed., *Essential Writings: Spirituality, Dialogue, Culture* (London: New City, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Rowan Williams, “Introduction,” in Vandeleene, ed., *Essential Writings*, xiv.

<sup>19</sup> See Judith Povilius’ contribution in this number of *Melita Theologica*. For texts on this theme, see also Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 32-26.

A Trinitarian rhythm marks much of Chiara's spiritual experience especially that of the 1949 period.<sup>20</sup> The notes that she made during that period reflect the mystical nature of the experience and the language is richly metaphorical and poetical.<sup>21</sup>

In understanding more deeply Mary's "place" in God's trinitarian plan, Chiara describes how she is amazed to see to what heights Mary is brought in God's love made manifest in Jesus Christ. While, like all of creation, Mary is "contained" by the Trinity, the incarnation brings us to realise that God, who is Love, out of love, becomes small before Mary (and with Mary, all of creation), bringing it about that as the mother of God she can contain God. With amazement, Chiara exclaims: "The sky contains the sun! Mary contains God!"<sup>22</sup> Mary lives a universal embrace, one in which we too, albeit on a totally different level, can share. In contemplating Mary as "embedded as a rare and unique creation in the Most Holy Trinity," Chiara came to understand her as "the flower of humanity, creation bursting into flower."<sup>23</sup>

In a simple but striking phrase, Chiara writes of Mary as the "hidden guardian of the Spirit within," noting how the Holy Spirit "grew" in Mary.<sup>24</sup> Mary found in the Holy Spirit rest and refreshment, strength and ardour, a capacity for living when so often many "deaths" might have crushed her. It is from her that we can learn how to let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup>

In interpreting the spiritual journey of those committed to living the Gospel together with others, Chiara too, like Pope John Paul, uses the expression the "Way of Mary" (*Via Mariae*).<sup>26</sup> It is a journey made up of various stages that stretch from the Annunciation to the Crucifixion and beyond. All of these stages are mirrored in some way in our personal journey and we can draw inspiration from the way Mary approached each of these moments.

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<sup>20</sup> See Piero Coda, *Dalla Trinità. L'avvento di Dio tra storia e profezia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011), 493-509.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding the nature of mystical writings, we think of Paul Ricoeur's publications. See also Massimo Baldini, *Il linguaggio dei mistici* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1986) and Francesca Brezzi, "Mistica e linguaggio in festa," *Babelonline* (2016): 1-2, 145-168.

<sup>22</sup> Notes from 19 July 1949 in Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 38.

<sup>23</sup> See notes of 9 July 1950 (Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 52) and Chiara's address to the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines, 14 January 1997, in part reproduced in Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 161.

<sup>24</sup> Notes of 19 July 1949 in Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 33 and 44-45.

<sup>25</sup> See Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 44-45.

<sup>26</sup> Vandeleene, ed., *Essential Writings*, 44-47.



Following on from the Focolare Movement's foundational experience of 1949-1951, various episodes and circumstances developed and fleshed out some of the features that emerged in those years and offered them as points of a spirituality to be lived. Increasingly, Chiara proposed Mary as *the* Christian model to be imitated. She did so in the light of the Second Vatican Council whose proceedings she followed with great interest. In 1978, for instance, she wrote, Mary

is a model because, now that the Council has given a high profile to the "people of God," Mary is the lay person *par excellence*, she is the virgin, the model for every engaged person, every married person, every mother, every widow. And she is the disciple *par excellence*, the perfect Christian, the living Word of God.<sup>27</sup>

Repeatedly she indicated Mary as a model of a revolution of love. She did so in proposing Mary's *Magnificat* as a manifesto for social revolution, convinced that re-living Mary cannot but bring about a transformation of the world.<sup>28</sup> Chiara often recalled for those following her spirituality a specific experience from 1957. Going into a church one day that year, she asked the Lord,

"Why did you wish to remain on earth, on every point of the earth in the most sweet Eucharist," and yet "you, you who are God have not found also a way to bring here and leave here Mary, the mother of all of us who are on our journey?" The reply that seemed to come from the Lord was, "I have not left her because I want to see her again in you (all of you) ... It is you who now must ease pains, soothe wounds, dry tears. Sing her litanies and strive to mirror yourself in them."<sup>29</sup>

Such imitation of Mary was never simply a private devotional matter. Mary, after all, is the woman who brought creation bodily into Paradise. Accordingly, Chiara views Mary assumed into heaven as an icon and pathway for those called to dedicate themselves in a concrete way to the renewal of our world. Mary's glorified body is a symbol of all human endeavours in which divine love is incarnated, such as economics and politics, art and social projects etc.

One aspect of Mary that loomed large in Chiara's thought was Mary's desolation at the foot of the Cross, a point, as we have seen, also central in Pope John Paul II. Already in the Paradise '49 experience, we find reflections on the culminating moment of Jesus' passion described in Jn 19:25-27 where, at the foot of the cross, Mary uttered her second "yes" to God.<sup>30</sup> With her first "yes"

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<sup>27</sup> Talk to a group of Bishops, 24 January 1978 in Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 103.

<sup>28</sup> See Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 126-128.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> See *ibid.*, 45-49.

at the Annunciation, she consented to becoming the mother of God. With the second “yes” at the foot of the cross, she was asked to detach herself from that maternity in order to become the “divine” mother in another way. Chiara understands Mary’s second “yes” to be full of meaning and implications for the life of the Church. In her spiritual doctrine she will often refer to the figure of “Mary Desolate.”<sup>31</sup>

It is from Mary Desolate that we learn a way of holiness that involves a daily “knowing how to lose” all that is not God in order to live with solemnity *the present moment*. We also discover, by looking at Mary Desolate, how to share in Mary’s spiritual maternity of humanity. The dynamic lived by Mary Desolate is described in the experience of Paradise ’49 in terms of loving in order to generate. On the one hand, this is a reflection of the very life of God-Love (God hands over his Son to us; Jesus gives up his life for us ...) and on the other hand, it is a lifelong programme for all Christians: to be ready to relinquish God in oneself so that Jesus is built up in others. On 2 October 1949 she wrote:

How beautiful is Mary desolate in this turning of herself towards humanity to gather up the fruit of her Son’s death – truly co-redeemer in this working together for the redemption of all. I see her with him running towards humanity which has become their god out of love for God! Both ready to leave everything for us. We too, like them, must leave God for human beings, must leave unity for the *Jesus Forsakens* scattered throughout the world. We must make of unity our launch pad towards humanity. We must come, we must live for sinners and not for the righteous – like him, like her.<sup>32</sup>

## The Marian Profile and the Petrine Profile in the Church

Both Pope John Paul II and Chiara Lubich exhibited a great passion for the Church and for both of them, Mary is key. Pope John Paul wrote that unless one looks to Mary “it is impossible to understand the mystery of the Church, her reality, her essential vitality.”<sup>33</sup> Chiara echoed that sentiment.

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<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.*, 76-97.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49. (Chiara uses the word *co-redeemer*. Since 1949, when Chiara wrote the quoted words, the term has been theologically debated in countless quarters. One of the most recent formal pronouncements, stating the inappropriate use of the term, is the Czestochowa Declaration of August 1996 by the Theological Commission of the Pontifical International Marian Academy. See <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/m/mediatrix-coredeematrix-and-advocate-declaration.php> [accessed, 11 March 2020]. *Note by the co-editors.*)

<sup>33</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, n.22.



During one of the sessions of the Second Vatican Council, in September 1964, the then recently appointed Archbishop of Krakow affirmed in a written intervention that Mary's motherly role continued in the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>34</sup> He was one of the Polish bishops who agreed that the document on Mary should be inserted as a chapter into the document on the Church rather than stand alone as a separate text. However, he wanted this chapter on Mary to be positioned as Chapter Two rather than as Chapter Eight of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, because he felt that way it would be more integrated, rather than looking like a corollary added on at the end.<sup>35</sup>

His theology of Mary's continuing role led him to speak of the Church's Marian principle as the fundamental dimension of the Church. Mary continues to be the heart of the Church, expressing what John Paul calls a maternal "mediation."<sup>36</sup> It is a carefully chosen term to be distinguished from the term "mediatrix." While always viewing Jesus Christ as the sole mediator, the Pope notes that it is an inclusive mediation, allowing for forms of participation. John Paul views the episode at Cana as offering us a first announcement of Mary's maternal mediation (Jn 2:1-11).<sup>37</sup>

Mary's maternal role is rooted right back in her obediential "yes" at the Annunciation and at the Cross, a "yes" uttered also on our behalf. In its deepest reality, the Church, as the Second Vatican Council underlined, is a pilgrim people whose model is Mary. Pope John Paul reads the bridal imagery of the Christ-Church relationship that we find in St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (Eph 5: 25-32) and taken up also in the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, n.7, in a Marian key.<sup>38</sup> With the example of Mary's faithfulness in following Christ, the Church, as a communion of love among its members, *in, with and like* Mary, journeys in an ever new relationship with Christ along the pathways of history.

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<sup>34</sup> See *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani III-2* (Vatican, 1971), 178-179; See also Avery Dulles, "Mary at the Dawn," 9.

<sup>35</sup> See Edward D. O'Connor, "The Roots of Pope John Paul II's Devotion to Mary," *Marian Studies* 39 (1988): 78-114, here at, 88.

<sup>36</sup> See Pope John Paul II's affirmations at his General Audience of 9 April 1997 regarding Mary's mediatory role. [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1997/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_09041997.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_09041997.html) (accessed 11 March 2020). See Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris mater*, nn.38-41.

<sup>37</sup> See Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris mater*, n.22.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, n.43.

Along its pilgrim journey, the Church echoes and, as it were, re-lives, Mary's maternal role.<sup>39</sup> Pope John Paul underlines this in his encyclical *Redemptoris mater*:

Mary is thus present in the mystery of the Church as a model. But the Church's mystery also consists in generating people to a new and immortal life: this is her motherhood in the Holy Spirit. And here Mary is not only the model and figure of the Church; she is much more... The Church's motherhood is accomplished not only according to the model and figure of the Mother of God but also with her "cooperation." The Church draws abundantly from this cooperation, that is to say from the maternal mediation which is characteristic of Mary, insofar as already on earth she cooperated in the rebirth and development of the Church's sons and daughters ...<sup>40</sup>

In one of the many occasions when Chiara and the Pope met, John Paul spoke to Chiara about the Church's Marian profile, citing the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. Such was the importance of that event for Chiara Lubich, that she ensured it would be recounted in the General Statutes of the Focolare Movement:

Chiara Lubich, in an audience with Pope John Paul II on 23 September 1985, asked the Pope if he would consider it appropriate that the President of the Work of Mary always be a woman. He replied: "Indeed, I would! It's something beautiful!" He referred to the four profiles of the Church that, according to the theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, were evident in the early Church – Petrine, Johannine, Pauline and Marian. In noting how von Balthasar's analysis wasn't just based on sociological data, but rather on theological and ecclesiological principles, the Pope said that these profiles continue to be present in the Church.<sup>41</sup>

Years later, on the occasion of the 1998 Pentecost meeting of ecclesial movements and communities in St Peter's Square, Chiara took the opportunity to thank the Pope, in front of all those assembled, for having explained and highlighted the Marian principle.

This focus on the Marian principle resonated strongly with Chiara's own insights. In considering the effects of Pentecost on Mary, she proposed that having relinquished her Son at the foot of the cross, Mary took on a new role in humanity. Indeed, she affirmed, Mary became "another Christ" (we can think of the line from St Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" [Gal 2:19-20]). With Christ and in him, Mary is intimately

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<sup>39</sup> See *ibid.*, nn.2, 25-28.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, n.44.

<sup>41</sup> See *Work of Mary (Focolare Movement) General Statutes of the Focolare Movement* (New York: 2008), art. 98, note 23.

linked to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> As depicted so often in Christian iconography, Mary is at the centre of the Upper Room at Pentecost playing a vital role in helping the Church to respond fully to God's plan for the Church: to be Jesus, by being, like Mary, totally open to God and open to one another.

The Swiss theologian already mentioned, Hans Urs von Balthasar, developed his reflection on the Marian principle by exploring the interaction of what he called the two co-essential fundamental polarities of the Church – the dimension linked to Mary and that linked to Peter.<sup>43</sup> On the one hand, as well as referring to the Pope and the hierarchy in general, the Church's Petrine dimension is manifest in what von Balthasar calls the "objective" holiness in the Church, such as the Word of God in Scripture and ordained ministry, sacraments and church disciple, all of which educate and form us. These are gifts given by the Risen Christ present to the Church in these "objective" forms. They mediate the Christ event to us.

On the other hand, the Church would not be Church if that was all it had. It would be a structural caricature distorting the true image of the Church. The "means" of holiness are never to be confused with the goal. And this brings us to the Marian dimension. This refers to the "subjective" holiness of the Church. It is found in all those, echoing Mary's perfect "yes" (and, obviously, in varying degrees) who give witness to the Gospel in the day-to-day life of the world. In other words, the Word of God no longer communicated and preached but lived, the sacraments not just administered but bearing fruit in the world of family, work, art, science, economics and politics, etc. The Marian principle is particularly visible in examples of holiness and spirituality, charismatic outpourings in movements, religious orders and congregations and it is manifest in a particular way in women. The Marian dimension, in other words, has to do with the actualisation and realisation of the gifts received (Eucharist and other sacraments), bringing them to their purpose – the transformation of ourselves and our world in Christ.

In an address Pope John Paul delivered to the Roman Curia just a few days before Christmas 1987, he spoke of the Church's two profiles. Taking up von Balthasar's intuition, he described how all that goes on in the life of the Church revolves around these two profiles. Future years may credit him with having directed our attention to a rediscovery and a new appreciation of the Marian dimension as a key aspect of the Church:

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<sup>42</sup> See Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 16, 51.

<sup>43</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986). See also Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (London and New York: New City, 2000).

This Marian profile is also – even perhaps more so – fundamental and characteristic for the Church as is the apostolic and Petrine profile to which it is profoundly united ... The Church lives on this authentic “Marian profile,” this “Marian dimension ...” The Marian dimension of the Church is antecedent to that of the Petrine ... Mary ... precedes all others, including obviously Peter himself and the Apostles ... The link between the two profiles of the Church, the Marian and the Petrine, is profound and complementary. This is so even though the Marian profile is anterior (to that of the Petrine) not only in the plan of God but also in time, as well as being supreme and pre-eminent, the richer in personal and communitarian implications ...<sup>44</sup>

Some months later, he returned to this theme in his Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*.<sup>45</sup> In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n.773), published in 1992, we read that the Marian dimension of the Church precedes the Petrine. In his 1995 Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday, Pope John Paul recommended they re-read *Mulieris dignitatem*; furthermore, in 1995, he wrote on the theme of the Marian principle in his Letter to Women. In 1998 during a catechesis on the signs of hope in the Church he commented, “At the dawn of the new millennium, we notice with joy the emergence of the Marian profile of the Church that summarises the deepest contents of the Conciliar renewal.”<sup>46</sup>

Chiara noted this new awareness that alongside the Petrine principle, there has always been within the Church a Marian principle, that is, a certain presence of Mary. In an international conference call to members of the Focolare Movement in November 1997, she noted some aspects which Hans Urs von Balthasar had written about, regarding this theological dimension. Asking herself what living the Marian profile meant, Chiara responded on two levels. First, it is to be lived by each of us personally in imitation of Mary:

Perhaps there is one word that gives us some insight into the attitude she always had in life. This word is “yes.” “Let it be done with me according to your word” (Lk 1:38) was her response to the angel at the moment of the incarnation and she repeated it continuously throughout her whole life. “Yes” to God, to all that he asked of her, to all that he would ask of her. “Yes” to his will.

I thought of this “yes” recently while admiring how someone repeated this word in her life and can certainly consider herself inspired by the Marian principle:

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<sup>44</sup> See Pope John Paul II, Address to the Roman Curia (22 December 1987), in *L'Osservatore Romano* (English Edition, 11 January 1988): 6-8.

<sup>45</sup> See Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n.27, note 55.

<sup>46</sup> Pope John Paul II, General Audience Catechesis (25 November 1998). [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1998/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_25111998.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_25111998.html) (accessed 11 March 2020).

Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She said that in order to be what we should be, that is, to reach perfection, to become saints, we have to say: “I want it!” In other words, “yes.” We always should say, “I want it” to all that God wants. In fact, for her, life is played out between “I want it” and “I don’t want it”, between saying yes and saying no ...<sup>47</sup>

For Chiara Lubich, the Marian profile also had to do with the Church’s communitarian identity and the role of charisms in the Church.<sup>48</sup> She viewed Mary as full of charisms. The theme of the Church’s charismatic dimension was one of the great rediscoveries of the Second Vatican Council. In tirelessly promoting a spirituality of communion, in order to increase the typical contribution of vitality and holiness that the Marian profile brings to the Church, Chiara also highlighted the role of charisms as expressing the Marian principle. Her desire for unity prompted her also to encourage unity among charisms at all levels.

One aspect of the Church’s Marian principle that Chiara underlined in a way that is perhaps new has to do with spiritually generating Jesus not just in individual souls but between people in their relationships.<sup>49</sup> If Mary brought Jesus physically into the world, then through our unity, communion and love for one another, we can “generate” him spiritually among two or more gathered in the name of Jesus (Mt 18:20). Chiara rejoiced in seeing other Churches and indeed members of other religions, welcome her understanding of Mary. She saw this as helping to prepare the Church that will be in the future.<sup>50</sup>

Speaking at St. Mary’s University College, London, she outlined her conviction that a greater recognition and promotion of the Church’s Marian profile would bring great fruits to the Church:

Everyone will see the Church as being more beautiful, more holy and more dynamic, more like a family. It will be a Church that is loving, welcoming, and better oriented towards its new frontiers: that of ecumenism, of interreligious dialogue, and of dialogue with people without a specific faith. It will be full of new developments, new vocations; it will be a charismatic Church, a Marian Church, a more missionary and more evangelizing Church. And all this will be for the glory of God and his mother.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 117-118.

<sup>48</sup> See Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 118-121.

<sup>49</sup> See Lubich, *Jesus in Our Midst, Source of Joy and Light* (London: New City, 2019), 112-117.

<sup>50</sup> Chiara Lubich, Talk to the Bishop-friends of the Focolare Movement, Rocca di Papa, 24 January 1978. See Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 17. On Chiara Lubich’s perception that the community experience of mutual love brings people to know Mary, see Stefano de Fiores, “Spiritualità,” in Stefano de Fiores, *Maria: Nuovissimo Dizionario* (Bologna: EDB, 2006), 2:1537.

<sup>51</sup> Lubich, *Flower of Humanity*, 119.

## Conclusion

On this centenary of the birth of Saint Pope John Paul II and Servant of God Chiara Lubich, there will rightly be many occasions to mark the contribution of each. Perhaps it is appropriate then to hope that in their commemoration, the theme of the Church's Marian principle that both of them underlined will not be overlooked but rather appreciated even more deeply in the light of documents such as *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*<sup>52</sup> and Pope Francis' conviction regarding the Marian feminine dimension of the Church.<sup>53</sup>

For both of them, what has primacy in the Church, in imitation of Mary and in some way participating in her "yes" to God, is to let the Christ event enter into our personal, ecclesial and social lives, shaping history in all its dimensions – from spirituality to economics, from the arts to ecology, from education to politics. The structural elements of the Church are essential but they are the means. The Marian profile speaks of the goal of these means – for the Church to radiate its Marian profile in the world. That means the Gospel put into practice and not just communicated, the sacraments lived out and not just received passively, the ecclesial communities alive in faith, hope and love and not just structures. In short, to emphasise the Church's Marian profile is to underline the Church's maternity.

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<sup>52</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church regarding the Relationship Between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church* (14 March 2016). [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20160516\\_iuvenescit-ecclesia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160516_iuvenescit-ecclesia_en.html) (accessed 11 March 2020).

<sup>53</sup> See Pope Francis' comment on the Marian principle in answer to a question in relation to the promotion of the role of women in the Church in *Corriere della sera* (5 March 2014). [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/14\\_marzo\\_04/vi-racconto-mio-primi-anno-papa-90f8a1c4-a3eb-11e3-b352-9ec6f8a34ecc.shtml?refresh\\_ce-cp](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/14_marzo_04/vi-racconto-mio-primi-anno-papa-90f8a1c4-a3eb-11e3-b352-9ec6f8a34ecc.shtml?refresh_ce-cp) (accessed 11 March 2020). See also his Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), n.103.