

MARY AND LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF CHRIST'S SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

In a recent book about Mary and the contemporary world we read:

... mariology and ecclesiology still go hand in hand and illuminate one another, as they have from ancient times.

The "mystical" Mary and the Church, in fact, can be seen to call one another on in pursuit of the full measure of Christian identity. What a Church it would be if it were truly like the Mary we image to ourselves: sensitive, approachable, alert and responsive to human suffering, warmly interested in human beings and understanding of their weaknesses, mediating to them the divine love which she has experienced in her heart. What a Mary *she* would be if she were truly like the ecclesial community of which we dream—alive and dynamic, *listening to and acting bravely on the voice of the Spirit*, facing into the future, not frozen on a pedestal like a statue for whom there is no question of further growth.

That this is *not* our primary image of her is not her fault, of course. It is something that we have done to her, an impoverishment caused by our static understanding of holiness and of life—and also by our static understanding of the feminine, with which we have so closely associated her.¹

The principal purpose of my presentation in this workshop is to propose ways in which we might renew our image of Mary for the good of theological doctrine and Christian devotion as a whole. If we know how to contemplate her place among the redeemed People of God, she shall shine forth to us as the archetype of the Church. Mary has been so highly favored in her receiving of redemption from Christ that she is the personal model for each one of us in listening to the Word of God. That Word is preeminently her own Son, the Word incarnate, whose voice we can hear only by the gift of faithful openness to his Spirit in the Church. That Word continually calls us into being as an ecclesial community of loving faith, religious worship and hopeful ministries. Thanks to the merits of her Son, Mary was graced to become the exemplar of Christian discipleship, of hearing the Word of God and keeping it in following Christ faithfully. We are called to listen to her as the spiritual mother of us all.

Listening to Mary's voice is listening to the voice of Christ's Spirit in the Church. Hers is a totally faithful echo of his. And, at the same time, it is a fully free and creative response—an unending *fiat* to the everlasting love of God announced in the redemptive incarnation. From the origins of the Church at the Annunciation to her consummation at the Parousia, Mary, the first fruits of redemption, remains the "sign of true hope, and comfort for the pilgrim people of God."² Throughout the course of

¹ P. Noone, *Mary for Today* (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1977), pp. 112-13. Italics added.

² Title of section V, chapter 8, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," trans. from *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. by A. Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Pub. Co., 1975), p. 422.

salvation history in the Church, as Cardinal Newman so clearly preached, "... the glories of Mary are for the sake of Jesus; and ... we praise and bless her as the first of creatures, that we may duly confess Him as our sole Creator."³ The truth about the Mother ever preserves and nourishes true faith in and proper devotion to the Son. An outstanding and ancient instance of this took place at the Council of Ephesus (431) with the definition of *Theotokos*, the God-bearer, an essentially Christological dogma. As in the midst of those preparing for the first Pentecost, who "... with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and with the brethren" (Acts 1:14), she is spiritually present to us as the mother and model of the Church. Mary enlightens and encourages us by her example, and inspires us by her intercession, to listen more attentively and respond more generously to the voice of her Son's Spirit so that we may receive redemption and mediate it to others with deeper devotion and greater commitment.

Only the conviction that is born of faith in the revealing word of God can convince us of Mary's abiding ministry of helping the members of Christ's Body toward full maturity in him. On the basis of this belief, my brief theological reflections upon the special meaning and value of the Marian mystery within the life of the Church will be developed along the following lines: an interpretation of Vatican II's "hierarchy of truths" and the place of the Marian dogmas within this order of Catholic doctrine or truths of revelation;⁴ the impact of this Christocentric and ecclesiological emphasis upon Marian doctrine and devotion. To renew the religious images and symbols associated with the Lord's Mother, we must treat Mariology in close connection with Christology, ecclesiology, pneumatology and Christian anthropology. This consideration of Mary in the context of Christian faith and theology as a whole should lead us not only toward a more dynamic understanding of her but even toward a profounder penetration into the mysteries of Christ, the Church, the Holy Spirit, and of graced humanity as adopted children of the Father. Such a concrete and practical grasp of doctrine forms the firm foundation for a balanced devotion and meaningful ministry.

AN INTERPRETATION OF VATICAN II'S "HIERARCHY OF TRUTHS"

The context of this conciliar teaching is chapter two of the Decree on Ecumenism. In its treatment of practicing ecumenism, the document stresses the need to expound Catholic doctrine integrally and admonishes against a false irenicism that would oppose the true ecumenical spirit in the quest of the Christian churches for organic unity. At the same time, the conciliar fathers emphasize the importance of explaining the truths of our faith with a sense of perspective which would put them into a certain order of dignity:

³J. H. Newman, *The New Eve* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1952), p. 68.

⁴Cf. F. M. Jelly, "Marian Dogmas within Vatican II's Hierarchy of Truths," *Marian Studies* 27 (1976), 17-40.

... in ecumenical dialogue, Catholic theologians, standing fast by the teaching of the Church yet searching together with separated brethren into the divine mysteries, should do so with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. *When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith.* Thus the way will be opened whereby this kind of "fraternal rivalry" will incite all to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ.⁵

The following paragraph in the conciliar document evidently identifies "the foundation of the Christian faith" with the revealed mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption: "Before the whole world let all Christians confess their faith in God, one and three, in the incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord."⁶ Apparently all other revealed mysteries contained in Catholic doctrine are to be hierarchically ordered on the basis of their relationship to the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ, our redeeming Lord.

There is no doubt about the attention that the "hierarchy of truths" teaching has drawn, especially in ecumenical circles. Addressing the Sixth International Mariological Congress, held in Zagreb during August, 1971, Rev. Dr. Eric Mascall, the very reputable Anglican theologian, began his presentation by saying: "From a theological and from an ecumenical standpoint, one of the most significant statements made by the Second Vatican Council is contained in the brief sentence in chapter two of the Decree on Ecumenism which says that 'there exists an order or "hierarchy" of truths of Catholic doctrine, since they have different connections with the foundation of the Christian faith.'"⁷ In an article that appeared during the Spring of 1965, O. Cullmann asserted: "... I consider this passage the most revolutionary to be found ... in any of the schema of the present Council."⁸ H. Mühlen, a Catholic theologian in Germany, wrote an article in 1966 about its special significance for the ecumenical dialogue and illustrated his points by using the Marian dogmas as examples of secondary truths in the "hierarchy."⁹ Despite such tributes there is not very much agreement about the precise meaning of this teaching from Vatican II.¹⁰ The following is a summary of my interpretation based upon the opinions of several theologians who have

⁵Decree on Ecumenism, n. 11, trans. from A. Flannery, *op. cit.*, p. 462. Italics added.

⁶*Ibid.*, n. 12, trans., *loc. cit.*

⁷E. L. Mascall, "The Place of Mariology in Christian Theology: An Anglican Approach," *De Cultu Mariano Saeculis VI-XI, Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani Internationalis in Croatia Anno 1971 Celebrati, Vol. 2, Considerationes Generales* (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1972), p. 125.

⁸O. Cullmann, "Comments on the Decree on Ecumenism," *The Ecumenical Review* 15 (April, 1965), 94.

⁹H. Mühlen, "Die Lehre des Vaticanum II über die 'hierarchia veritatum' und ihre Bedeutung für den ökumenischen Dialog," *Theologie und Glaube* 56 (1966), 303-35.

¹⁰"Since Vatican II, there has been a great deal of speculation as to the norms for determining which doctrines are primary or central and which secondary or peripheral, but there does not seem to be any consensus." A. Dulles, *The Resilient Church* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1977), p. 55.

addressed the question.¹¹ This is not to say, however, that all or any one of them would agree with every point in my composite of conclusions.

We may identify seven principal points in my interpretation of Vatican II's "hierarchy of truths":¹² (1) the "foundation of the Christian faith," i.e., the focus of the primary or central truths in the "hierarchy," is the mystery of the triune God revealed in the incarnate Son, our redeeming Lord; (2) these central truths of our faith are on the level of the goal of our salvation in Christ, those which essentially constitute blessedness in the glory of heaven; (3) the secondary or peripheral truths are no less revealed and no less true; (4) such truths of revelation, e.g., the sacraments of the Church, the Marian dogmas, etc., are on the level of means toward our total redemption in eternal life; (5) the peripheral truths vary in this "hierarchy" of importance, not by reason of the theological notes attached to them, e.g., defined dogmas of our faith, or "of faith" from the constant teaching of the ordinary universal magisterium, but through the closeness of their connection with the "foundation of the Christian faith"; (6) their main value lies in the illumination of the central mystery of Christianity as well as in their function of applying the meaning of the Trinity, Incarnation and Redemption to our daily Christian existence; and, (7) these secondary or peripheral truths of revelation are dependent upon and derived from the central mystery of our Christian faith through a development in the Church's living tradition of teaching, believing, worship, mission, etc., which, under the direction of the Spirit, transcends but includes theological development; and, they can vary in importance in the "hierarchy" from time to time in the Church's history depending upon the needs of her members for salvation. The criterion for their position, therefore, is how necessary they are in fostering the foundation of our faith. This teaching from Vatican II on the "hierarchy of truths" seems to develop the teaching of Vatican I which speaks of the enlightenment that reason receives from the relationship between truths of faith: "Reason, indeed, enlightened by faith, when it seeks earnestly, piously, calmly, attains by a gift from God some understanding, and that very fruitful, of mysteries; partly from the analogy of those things which it naturally knows, partly from the relations the mysteries bear to one another and to the last end of man."¹³ The double function of the peripheral truths in the "hierarchy," i.e., of helping us penetrate more profoundly the meaning of the central mystery and of applying that meaning more practically to our

¹¹ Y. Congar, "On the 'Hierarchia Veritatum,'" *The Heritage of the Early Church: Essays in Honor of the Very Rev. G. V. Florovsky* (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1973), 409-20; G. H. Tavard, "Hierarchia Veritatum": a Preliminary Investigation," *Theological Studies* 32 (June, 1971), 278-89; P. O'Connell, "Hierarchy of Truths," *The Dublin Papers on Ecumenism*, ed. by P. S. de Achútegui (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1972), 83-117; U. Valeske, *Hierarchia Veritatum* (Munich: Claudius, 1968).

¹² Cf. J. Feiner, "Decree on Ecumenism," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by H. Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 118-23.

¹³ Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Filius*, April 24, 1870, chap. 4, trans. in *The Teaching of the Church*, ed. by K. Rahner (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1967), p. 36. Italics added.

daily Christian lives, would appear to follow from this teaching of Vatican Council I.

PLACE OF THE MARIAN DOGMAS WITHIN THE
"HIERARCHY OF TRUTHS"

This twofold function may be seen in the case of the revealed truths about Mary, particularly in relationship to Christ and the Church as the community of redemption. The very title of chapter 8 in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church brings out the intimate relationship between the mysteries: "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." It is most significant for the renewal of Mariology and of Marian devotion that the conciliar fathers voted by a sufficient majority on October 29, 1963 to make the Marian schema a part of that on the Church. Obviously this was of ecumenical importance also, not because it seemed to minimize devotion to the Blessed Virgin but since it helped remove her from a certain "isolationism" and "privilege-centered" Mariology which had become quite offensive to other Christian churches. She was thus placed in the setting where her real role in the work of redemption and the true reason for the Church's special devotion to her could be brought out in a balanced way. The title of chapter 8 in *Lumen gentium*, then, does clearly signify a Mariology that is at once Christocentric and ecclesiotypical. One commentator carefully explains the mutual harmony between both these emphases:

There can be no conflict between seeing Mary as the archetype of the Church and seeing her in relation to Christ. She is the archetype of the Church only because her connection with Christ as his mother forms the basis for the share which the Church as Christ's bride has in his work. Conversely, a Christocentric view of Mary is incompatible with any individualist conception of Christ and his work; it necessarily considers Christ together with that mysterious body which he has acquired through his redemption and which is the Church.¹⁴

It is precisely this Christocentric and ecclesiotypical focus in contemporary Mariology that situates the Marian dogmas within the "hierarchy of truths." Once they are more dynamically related to the mystery of Christ and the Church, their connection with other truths of our faith and of theology will become more apparent. Under the impetus of Vatican II, therefore, the theology of Mary is moving more and more away from a "privilege-centered" to a "sharing-oriented" Mariology in which her special graces and prerogatives are seen to be primarily for the sake of her Son and his redeemed-redeeming Body the Church.

Obviously the central Christocentric dogma about Mary is the revealed truth that she is the *Theotokos*. In the context of its definition at the Council of Ephesus (431) and its reaffirmation at the Council of Chalcedon (451), it is in fact essentially a Christological dogma. Our faith

¹⁴O. Semmelroth, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," chap. 8, in H. Vorgrimler, ed., I, 1967, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

regarding her unique vocation to be the mother of the incarnate Son of God has been traditionally understood as necessary to preserve our authentic belief in the central Christian mystery of Jesus Christ. St. Thomas clearly affirms the intimate connection between Mary's motherhood of God and the mystery of the Incarnation: "... the humanity of Christ and the maternity of the Virgin are so closely associated that to be in error about the one must mean to be mistaken also about the other."¹⁵ The Angelic Doctor treats the same basic truth about the need to accept the mystery of the *Theotokos* to avoid any misinterpretation about Christ in many other places, but nowhere states his case more clearly than in the *Summa Theologiae*: "Since a human nature was assumed by a divine person at the very moment of conception, it must follow that God was truly conceived and born of the Virgin."¹⁶ His theological reasoning proceeds primarily from the premise of faith in the hypostatic union and then from one of reason that motherhood is a relationship that reaches the person conceived and born of a woman. Surely some truth is predicated of Mary that she is truly the mother of a divine person *incarnate*, but this is asserted essentially and primarily for the sake of the revealed truth about her Son.

The conclusion that Mary is truly (*vere*) the Mother of God is more than a theological conclusion in the technical sense of the term. In fact it is an *argumentum ex convenientia*, i.e., a theological argument of fittingness for our Christian faith that she is the mother of the Word incarnate in the proper sense of motherhood. At the same time it manifests the appropriateness of our believing in the mystery of the hypostatic union from the moment of Christ's conception in her virginal womb. St. Thomas' metaphysics of personality is behind his theological reasoning, namely, that the *esse* or act of being in any subject follows upon its subsistence and consequently there is formally a unique act of divine being even in the humanity of God's Son.¹⁷ This is his special mode of rendering the mystery of the Incarnation intelligible. The ontological realism affirmed by faith in the Chalcedonian Christology, however, both grounds and transcends any particular school of systematic theology. The Common Doctor's approach to the mystery does underline the centrality of the Christological character of the *Theotokos* dogma, but not in isolation from other revealed truths. This is completely in accord with the best in the tradition of the churches in the East. As René Laurentin remarks:

The best representatives of this tradition never seem to lose sight of the fact that Mary's virginity, conception in holiness, and assumption, as well as her present relationship with mankind are precisely the virginity, sanctity, conception and assumption of the *Theotokos*, or in other words, a particularly privileged illustration of the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation. However, let us not exaggerate. I am not arguing here for a mistrust of formulae, or for an impoverishment of concepts. . . . Nevertheless, do let us see these formulae, always, in their most essential, most theological, most Christolog-

¹⁵ *Com. in Sent.*, III, d. 4, q. 2, a. 2.

¹⁶ *S.T.* III, q. 35, a. 4 c.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 17, a. 2 c.

ical light, the light that shines in the word, *Theotokos*. In this we contemplate the most sublime heights of Mary's glory, and, at the same time, the sign and human reality by means of which God actually entered into our tragic story to make of it a history of salvation. In this mystery of the *Theotokos* we see, finally, the relationship, all of grace and love, which God contracted with the holiest, the most receptive, and the most cooperative of all the redeemed.¹⁸

Paradoxically, that which is most distinctive of Mary in salvation history, namely, her unique vocation to be mother of the Word incarnate, is what relates her most profoundly and intimately to each one of us in her Son's Church. As was observed, the Christocentric and ecclesiotypical dimensions of the Marian dogmas must ever be closely connected. The meaning of Mary's motherhood in the "hierarchy of truths" becomes more apparent when considered in the context of other revealed truths about her place in the mystery of redemption.

The Christocentric character of the virginal conception is based upon its witnessing to the divine transcendence of the child who has no human father since God alone is his Father.¹⁹ Obviously such a theological argument of convenience or the Christological symbolism seen in the fact of the virginal conception should in no way suggest a negative attitude toward the sexual expression of love in marriage. Nor is it a compromise of the humanity when the fittingness of the mystery as a whole is more fully grasped. For the religious significance of Mary's virginal motherhood of God incarnate also applies to our Christian doctrine of grace which attributes our salvation in Christ solely to the divine initiative, the completely gracious and gratuitous character of the Blessed Trinity's redeeming love for us. According to the theology of Karl Barth, faith in the virginal conception grounds the spiritual interpretation of the Incarnation "in which God's own work is seen in God's own light."²⁰ Commenting upon this Barthian teaching, one theologian of the Reformed tradition asserts:

In the joyful celebration of the Virgin Mary, we hear the needed word of truth. God has taken the initiative for human salvation. It is not our doing but his gift. Yet it is a gift that has entered our time and place. Mary the virgin is the continuing witness to the divine initiative. Mary the mother, as the bearer of Jesus, makes of this divine initiative a flesh and blood fact in our lives. The receptivity of Mary is God's "no" to the secular religion of human apotheosis. She is receiving by the Holy Spirit the gift of the salvation that no human power could create. She is the living expression of *sola gratia*. As such, she is the prototype of every believer. Her "Yes" to God's call is the opening of the way to salvation.²¹

And so the Christocentric merges into the ecclesiotypical symbolism of the mystery. Mary's virginal motherhood of the Lord is the archetype

¹⁸R. Laurentin, *The Question of Mary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), p. 143.

¹⁹St. Thomas Aquinas, *S.T.*, III, q. 28, a. 1 c.

²⁰K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 177.

²¹D. G. Dawe, *From Dysfunction to Disbelief: The Virgin Mary in Reformed Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1977), p. 9.

for the Church both as a *redeemed* community called to eternal life in Christ by the gift of faith, and as a *redeeming* community called to the spiritual maternity of begetting Christians through her ministry of the word and the sacraments.²² The dogma of her perpetual virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of God in devoting herself completely to Christ becomes a special sign for the reality of the eschatological Church where there is no giving and receiving in marriage, and thus for the priestly and religious witnesses in the pilgrim Church.²³ Finally, the theological note commonly attached to the dogma of Mary's virginity is *de fide immediate*, i.e., a dogma of faith as a result of the testimony of the ordinary universal magisterium and the *sensus fidelium* within the living tradition of the Church, and not by reason of a solemn definition of the extraordinary magisterium (*de fide definita*, or *de fide mediate*, i.e., through the medium of a definition).²⁴

Although the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption are ecclesiotypical in their emphasis, they must first be considered as Christocentric in revealing Mary as the first fruits of Christ's redemption. In showing how the Immaculate Conception is to be made understandable in the context of revelation as a whole, Karl Rahner observed: "Mary is intelligible only in terms of Christ. . . . It may indeed be said that a sense of Marian dogma is an indication of whether Christological dogma is being taken really seriously. . . ."²⁵ In Mary we find the clearest revelation of her Son's saving grace since in her it was always victorious. In Mary's experience of being redeemed by Christ, grace was never inhibited. Her response of hopeful faith and loving obedience voiced in the *fiat* met the revealing word of God with complete openness. She was truly blessed because she heard God's word and kept it so faithfully (cf. Lk 11:28). "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). She was able to respond so generously to God's loving plan of salvation since he who is mighty so highly favored her and accomplished such great things in her (cf. Lk 1:28, 49). The saving event of the redemptive Incarnation found its fullest expression in her by whom God's "yes" of merciful love was received with a *fiat* filled with gratitude. In Mary only grace is present according to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. There is no sin, guilt or consequences of moral evil in her. In her spiritual odyssey is revealed the full power of redeeming love. In her redemption by preservation (anticipatory redemption by reason of Christ's foreseen merits), the triune God reveals to us the undivided Christian personality. She shows concretely that, on account of her Son's sacrifice and glorifica-

²²"It was appropriate for our Head, by a wonderful miracle, to be born physically of a virgin in order to signify that his members should be born spiritually of a virgin Church." St. Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 6, *PL* 40, 399.

²³*Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith*, A Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary, NCCB (Washington, D.C.: USCC Publications Office, 1973), pp. 44-46.

²⁴F. M. Jelly, "Mary's Virginity in the Symbols and Councils," *Marian Studies* 21 (1970), 89-90.

²⁵K. Rahner, "The Immaculate Conception," *Theological Investigations*, I (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), p. 202.

tion, grace has a priority over guilt even in our sinful world.²⁶ Her unique privilege of the Immaculate Conception makes Mary more at-one (cf. Christ's "atonement") with us as redeemed persons. It witnesses eloquently to the truth that we are born into a world which is graced with the new creation of Christ even before our baptism—our being immaculately conceived and reborn in him.

Mary was led by Christ to the totality of redemption in her glorious Assumption when she was personally reunited with him. Rahner sees this defined dogma as "only really intelligible in the totality of the one saving Truth."²⁷ He relates it "essentially and immediately" to the virginal conception and the resurrection of the Lord. This inherent Christocentric dimension of the dogma promptly discloses its ecclesiotypical significance since the virginal conception of Christ in Mary was an eschatological event that once-for-all transformed the cosmos into an irrevocably redeemed condition. As the redeemer who inaugurated this eschatological event, Christ's resurrection resulted normally from his passion and death. Mary, the archetype of the Church's call to total redemption in Christ, is fittingly assumed into heaven and glorified in her whole human personhood since she had so intimate a part to play in the initiation of the eschatological era. Belief in the Assumption bestows upon our faith in the central mystery of redemption the conviction that one of us redeemed persons in the Church—at least one of us—is already glorified in the Spirit with the Lord. A promise already fulfilled even in a single human person is a great confirmation of our own hope to share in the resurrection. In fact, the dogma of the Assumption and the Marian devotion that it inspires about Mary's place in the Communion of Saints, helps sustain our faith and piety regarding the reality of our risen Lord's humanity and his unique mediatorship which are at the center of our Christian beliefs.

IMPACT UPON MARIAN DOCTRINE AND DEVOTION

Lastly let us look more closely at the meaning of the Christocentric and ecclesiotypical emphasis for the renewal of Mariology and of devotion to Mary and at its value for Catholic theology and piety as a whole. As has been remarked, the teaching of Vatican II on Our Lady has helped inspire a revived interest in the dynamic relationship between Mary and the Church. Of course, like the principal renewals undertaken by the Council, this one too had its pre-conciliar sources.²⁸ And also like the liturgical, biblical and other renewals, the Marian renewal is at the same time a rediscovery. My presentation began with the quoted assertion: "... mariology and ecclesiology still go hand in hand and illuminate

²⁶K. Rahner, "The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception in Our Spiritual Life," *Theological Investigations*, 3 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1967), p. 140.

²⁷K. Rahner, "The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption," *Theological Investigations*, 1, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

²⁸Cf. O. Semmelroth, *Mary, Archetype of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963). Originally published in German under the title *Urbild der Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 2nd ed., 1954).

one another, *as they have from ancient times.*"²⁹ The American Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary teaches:

The understanding of Mary in Christian history unfolded along the lines of the Scriptures. The Church saw herself symbolized in the Virgin Mary. The story of Mary, as the Church has come to see her, is at the same time the record of the Church's own self-discovery. . . . Mary stands out as uniquely virgin and mother within the Church, itself rightly called virgin and mother. As the Virgin Mary conceived and brought forth Jesus, so the Church, virgin in purity of faith, brings forth His brethren at the baptismal font.³⁰

The "new Eve" image is the most ancient consideration of Mary after the Scriptures.³¹ This is a fertile source of the Mary-Church analogy and typology that has been rediscovered during recent years in light of Cardinal Newman's profound patristic studies. And contemporary research shows how fruitful an image it is in understanding the early witness of the Fathers, especially that of St. Irenaeus.³² The parallel of contrast between Eve and Mary in disobedience vs. obedience, death vs. life, etc. becomes a comparison of similarity between Mary and the Church when both are called the "new Eve." This throws new light upon the classical debate about the fundamental principle of Mariology.

In establishing his thesis that the basic Marian idea is Mary, the archetype of the Church, Otto Semmelroth observes: "Tradition above all, has carried on the comparison of Mary and Eve with the perspective on the Church. The idea that Mary is the Type of the Church pervades the Fathers' Mariology with consistent eloquence. Accordingly one must ask why theology has not pursued the idea more extensively, for if it had, both Ecclesiology and Mariology would have benefitted greatly."³³ Doubtless, one of the main reasons why many theologians have not pursued the idea of Mary as archetype of the Church is their failure to connect the Christocentric and the ecclesiotypical aspects of the Marian dogmas within the context of the "hierarchy of truths." It is not my intention here to take sides in the classical controversy concerning the fundamental principle of mariology. Rather it is to point out the cause of excesses on any side. To identify the "divine maternity" as the central Mariological principle in such wise as to make of it an abstraction artificially isolated from Mary's virginity, holiness, role in the redemption, etc., is one extreme position. An opposite extreme is to formulate as the basic Marian idea her being prototype of the Church without sufficiently relating it to her being the *Theotokos*. Neither excessive approach takes seriously enough the place of Mary in relation to the "foundation of the Christian faith." E. Schillebeeckx seems to propose a mediating position when he states: "Her concrete motherhood with regard to Christ, the redeeming God-man, freely accepted in faith—her fully committed divine motherhood—this is both the key to a full under-

²⁹Noone, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Italics added.

³⁰*Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith, op. cit.*, p. 15, n. 38.

³¹*Ibid.*, n. 40.

³²Cf. J. A. Ross Mackenzie, "The Patristic Witness to the Virgin Mary as the New Eve," *Marian Studies* 29 (1978), 67-78.

³³Semmelroth, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

standing of the Marian mystery and the basic Mariological principle, which is concretely identical with Mary's objectively and subjectively unique state of being redeemed."³⁴ Like Semmelroth, he would include Mary as the archetype of the Church within the basic Marian idea; unlike him, however, he would not make it the foundation for her divine motherhood.³⁵

Schillebeeckx's thesis includes the Christocentric (Mary's "fully committed divine motherhood") and the ecclesiotypical (her "objectively and subjectively unique state of being redeemed") within the one organic principle as the basic Marian idea. This is helpful for us to contemplate the Marian mystery in perspective of the "hierarchy of truths." What matters more for our purposes, however, is that both theologians make Mary's relationship to the redeemed-redeeming community of the Church central to Mariology. Her vocation through divine predestination to be the mother of the Word incarnate must be seen in close connection with the gifts which reveal her calling to be the prototype of the Church. The Immaculate Conception is the special grace of Mary's vocation that prepared her to utter the *fiat* of the Annunciation. Her free acceptance of the invitation to be the Redeemer's mother also voiced her willingness to share in our redemption. Following St. Bernard, St. Thomas Aquinas considered that her consent was given "in place of the whole human race."³⁶ Since she has accepted God's loving plan for her, we are able to receive the fruits of our Lord's redeeming love into our own lives. As the first fruits of her Son's redeeming love into our own lives. As the first fruits of her Son's redemption, she is uniquely redeemed objectively. As responding to her vocation with total self-giving, she is uniquely redeemed subjectively. Because she received the Redeemer into her own life with the deepest of loving faith, Mary cooperated maternally in Christ's objective redemption of the human race. Surely Christ alone is our Redeemer who reconciles the world to the Father in the Holy Spirit. Mary's "fully committed divine motherhood," however, has given her graced and free act of identification with his objective redemption a truly redemptive meaning and value for all the members of his Church.

Mary's motherhood of Christ is both bridal and virginal, and this has rich ecclesiotypical significance.³⁷ Her relationship as the spiritual bride of our Redeemer is based not only upon the vocal *fiat* of free consent at the Annunciation but also upon the silent *fiat* at the foot of the cross. Mary's compassion on Calvary freely accepted the fruits of her Son's sacrifice both for her own redemption and that of the Church. At the same time and as a result of this creative receptivity, her bridal motherhood is also virginal. Her intimate and unique association with the Redeemer and his work requires that her fecundity be not from man's power but from the breath of the Holy Spirit. If she had conceived Christ other than as a virgin, her bridal relationship with the *Logos*

³⁴E. Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 106.

³⁵Semmelroth, *op. cit.*, p. 51; cf. Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³⁶S. T., III, q. 30, a. 1 c.

³⁷Semmelroth, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-42.

incarnate would have been blurred. If she did not remain a virgin, her complete and continuous fidelity to Christ and his mission would have been compromised. Mary then is the archetype of the Church who is the virginal bride of Christ. As the community of persons redeemed by Christ she is called to constant fidelity to his word and his alone. She is to listen only to his voice and its authentic channels of communication in her living tradition of faith. Continually called into existence by hearing the one saving truth of the Word incarnate, the Church also images the spiritual motherhood of Mary in her mission of mediating redemption to the world.

It is in this context of their mutual relationship as virginal and bridal mothers that both Mary and the Church are more dynamically associated with the Holy Spirit. Their spiritual fecundity is the fruit of a continuous Pentecost, the abiding presence and activity of our risen Lord's Spirit. The closer linking of Mariology and pneumatology has much to contribute toward a more vibrant Christology, ecclesiology and Christian anthropology.³⁸ When Karl Rahner was asked why he thought a decline in devotion to Mary had taken place, his reply was that "... the special temptation that affects Christians today, Catholics and Protestants alike, is the temptation to turn the central truths of the faith into abstractions, and abstractions have no need of mothers."³⁹ By relating Mary and the Holy Spirit more closely, we can avoid such abstractionism and concretize our theological reflections upon the central Christian mysteries. Among the redeemed People of God, Mary is the new creation *par excellence*, the masterpiece of the *digitus Dei*, her Son's Spirit. In her is most magnificently revealed that Christ redeems persons and not a collectivity. The Church is a community of redeemed persons and not an abstract collection of individuals. In contemplating the concrete divine motherhood of Mary, the archetype of her own mysterious nature, the Church comes to realize more clearly that the Spirit touches each one of her members to actualize the best in everyone's personality for the sake of building up the community in love. Mary was uniquely touched by the Spirit to be the exemplar for us all, to be the prototype of what the Church is called to be and to become in all her members as the *pleroma* of grace and glory.

In *Marialis cultus*, Pope Paul VI says of Mary by way of giving some anthropological guidelines for devotion to her: "She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples. All of this has a permanent and universal exemplary value."⁴⁰ In her we find every Christian virtue exemplified.⁴¹ Of course she is not an exemplar in the sense of being a blueprint model for the contemporary Christian to imitate. Rather, guided by the Spirit, we must prayerfully

³⁸Cf. A. Schmemmann, "Our Lady and the Holy Spirit," *Marian Studies* 23 (1972), 69-78.

³⁹Quoted by Leon Cardinal Suenens, "Mary and the World of Today," *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., June 15, 1972.

⁴⁰Pope Paul VI, *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Washington, D.C.: USCC Publications Office, 1974), p. 26, n. 35.

⁴¹St. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in salutationem angelicam*.

penetrate to the perennial meaning of her faith, courage, constancy and concern. And, while she speaks to us all if we will listen, Mary does have a special message for modern woman. Among the several examples of this given by the Holy Father, one is: "... the modern woman, anxious to participate with decision-making power in the affairs of the community, will contemplate with intimate joy Mary who, taken into dialogue with God, gives her active and responsible consent, not to the solution of a contingent problem, but to that 'event of world importance,' as the Incarnation of the Word has been rightly called."⁴²

And so, if we are truly listening with Mary to the voice of her Son's Spirit in the Church, both Marian doctrine and devotion should lead us toward a deeper understanding and more generous serving of the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ our redeeming Lord. Even her mediation and intercession, still a problem with many, will be interpreted in accord with the Christocentric emphasis of Vatican II's teaching on the subject: "But Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power."⁴³ As an aid in reconceptualizing our grasp of the mystery, we must remove from Mary's mediation any image of her as a go-between or bridge over an abyss that divides us from a remote Christ.⁴⁴ This is to miss the most important meaning of the Incarnation and the true grandeur of Mary—that God the Son has chosen to become one of us in her and to remain hypostatically united to his risen humanity forever. Mary's spiritual maternity in action, i.e., her mediating role, is primarily to help dispose us to open our eyes of faith more fully for a more mature encounter with her Son who is always near us.⁴⁵ She enlightens and inspires her spiritual children by her example and intercessory role to become more docile to the direct action of her Son's Spirit and to cooperate more generously with the special gifts of her divine Spouse. Such reflections, it is hoped, will help renew Christian doctrine and devotion.

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⁴²Pope Paul VI, *op. cit.*, p. 27, n. 37.

⁴³Flannery, ed., *op. cit.*, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," p. 418, n. 60.

⁴⁴Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁴⁵R. Lawler, D. W. Wuerl, T. C. Lawler, eds., *The Teaching of Christ* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1976), p. 240.