

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis
Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Master of Sacred Theology Seminar Papers

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

5-31-1995

Mariology in the Roman Catholic Magisterium since the Second Vatican Council

David Mahsman

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, dmahsman@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/stmsp>

 Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mahsman, David, "Mariology in the Roman Catholic Magisterium since the Second Vatican Council" (1995). *Master of Sacred Theology Seminar Papers*. 13.

<https://scholar.csl.edu/stmsp/13>

This Seminar Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Sacred Theology Seminar Papers by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

MARIOLOGY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC MAGISTERIUM
SINCE THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

A Seminar Paper presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

David L. Mahsman

May 1995

Approved by JAO Preus

Robert Rosin

Joseph Burbom

MARIOLOGY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC MAGISTERIUM
SINCE THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

When Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, closed the third session of the Second Vatican Council, which had approved the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, he did so with a prayer to the Virgin Mary. He addressed her as "Mother of the Church."¹

When Pope John Paul II on October 11, 1992, concluded an apostolic constitution for the publication of a new Roman Catholic catechism, he did so with a prayer for the "powerful intercession" of the Virgin Mary. He addressed her as "Mother of the Incarnate Word and Mother of the Church."²

The parallels between these papal acts, separated by nearly 30 years, are not simply coincidental. Roman Catholic Mariology continues today on a course that was set for it by Vatican II. The nature of that course, as it was charted by the Council fathers and as it has surfaced in church documents ever since, is the subject for examination and evaluation in this paper.

Contemporary Roman Catholic Mariology is an important subject for Lutheran consideration, because the Virgin Mary and her place in

¹Pope Paul VI, "Closing Address of Pope Paul VI, Nov. 21, 1964," appendix to Xavier Rynne, The Third Session: The Debates and Decrees of Vatican Council II September 14 to November 21, 1964 (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965), p. 389.

²Pope John Paul II, "Fidei depositum," in Catechism of the Catholic Church (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), p. 6.

salvation history, which became an issue in the Reformation, continues to be one of the more high-profile loci that define the breach in Western Christendom.

"The role of the Mother of Jesus remains one of our many persisting religious differences. . . ," the U.S. Catholic bishops noted in a pastoral letter published in 1973.³ "No sound ecumenism," the bishops added, "can ignore the question of Mary."⁴

The Ökumene-Lexikon, in its article on "Maria," points to the issue's significance this way: "Mariology is, now as before, the crossroads where the ecclesiological, Christological and anthropological problem lines converge. It is here that the division between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation manifests itself."⁵

How great is that division? Did Vatican II, often cited for its ecumenical sensitivity, serve at least to narrow the division? This paper seeks to provide at least a start to answering those questions by examining what the Roman Catholic magisterium in official documents has said about the Blessed Virgin, beginning with Vatican II.

Vatican II

Although the Second Vatican Council speaks of the Virgin Mary in a number of its documents, Chapter VIII of Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic

³National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1973), p. 39.

⁴Ibid., p. 41.

⁵Ökumene-Lexikon: Kirchen, Religionen, Bewegungen, p. 778, quoted in Harding Meyer, "The Ecumenical Unburdening of the Mariological Problem: A Lutheran Perspective," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 26 (Fall 1989):682.

Constitution on the Church, provides the Council's most thorough treatment of the Mother of our Lord. Pope Paul VI termed it "a vast synthesis of the Catholic doctrine regarding the place which the Blessed Mary occupies in the mystery of Christ and the Church."⁶

More than that, "Our Lady," as the chapter is titled, represents something of a new beginning for the way in which the Roman Catholic Church has treated Mariology.

Writes Catholic scholar Stefano De Fiores: "In view of the importance of Chapter VIII of Lumen Gentium from the viewpoint of the magisterium, theological quality, and actual influence, it represents a watershed, and we must take it as our starting point for an understanding of the direction of mariological trends in the postconciliar period."⁷

At the Council's first session, in 1962, the fathers were presented with a separate schema on the Virgin Mary. Some supported that approach, but others opposed it. While there is no single reason for the debate,⁸ another Catholic scholar, Gregory Baum, offers this summary:

These Fathers [those opposed to a separate schema on Mary] wished to

⁶Pope Paul VI, p. 386.

⁷Stefano De Fiores, "Mary in Postconciliar Theology," in Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives, 3 vols., ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 1:470.

⁸See, for example, Otto Semmelroth, "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church," in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Vol. 1, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), pp. 285-286. Accounts of the actual debate leading up to final approval of "Our Lady" and its inclusion in the schema on the Church have been treated by many authors and is now well known. Cf. De Fiores and Gregory Baum (see below).

present the doctrine on Mary as a chapter in the Constitution on the Church in order to announce more clearly to the faithful that Mary is a member of God's People and a type or image of the entire Church. In this way, they hoped to give deeper meaning to the place of Mary in Christian doctrine.⁹

Beginning with Vatican II, then, Mariology is presented in a new context, that of the Church. De Fiores says that the decision to treat Mary within the schema on the Church was "a formal expression of the tendency to view ecclesiology as an appropriate context in which to treat the mother of our Lord, thus marking an end to the isolated mariology that had become established in the posttridentine period."¹⁰

Underlying and unifying the new approach, according to De Fiores, is the perspective of "salvation history." With that in mind, he says that Chapter VIII "represents a movement away from a deductive type of mariology that was centered on Mary and her privileges, had a tendency to foster marian titles and dogmas, and was closed to dialogue with our brothers of the Reform tradition."¹¹

"Our Lady" is the only chapter in Lumen Gentium that has separate division headings. Let us now examine the document according to those headings.

I. Introduction

The "Introduction" summarizes the purpose of the entire chapter: The Council, "while expounding the doctrine on the Church, in which the divine Redeemer brings about our salvation, intends to set forth

⁹Gregory Baum, "The Constitution on the Church," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 2 (Winter 1965):26.

¹⁰De Fiores, p. 471.

¹¹Ibid.

painstakingly both the role of the blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Incarnate Word and the Mystical Body, and the duties of the redeemed towards the Mother of God, who is mother of Christ and mother of men, and most of all those who believe" (LG 54).¹²

The Council fathers do not, however, "intend to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified" (LG 54).

From the outset, the Council makes clear that the Virgin Mary is redeemed by the merits of Christ, just as all men, though "in a more exalted fashion." She is united to Christ, her Son, by a "close and indissoluble tie" and "far surpasses all creatures," whether in heaven or on earth. But she is also a child of Adam and so is united as well "to all those who are to be saved." Quoting St. Augustine, the fathers add that "she is clearly the mother of the members of Christ . . . since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head."¹³ Thus she not only is the most eminent member of the Church, but also its type and model in faith and love (LG 53).

II. The Function of the Blessed Virgin in the Plan of Salvation

This section traces the role of the Virgin Mary in salvation

¹²Lumen Gentium 54. Austin Flannery, ed., Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, new revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), p. 414. All references to Lumen Gentium as translated in Flannery will be indicated by the abbreviation "LG" and paragraph number placed in parentheses within the text of this paper.

¹³St. Augustine, "De S. Virginitate," in J.P. Migne, Patrologia Latina, 217 vols. (1878-1890), 40:399.

history from the prophecy in Gen. 3:15 and elsewhere in the Old Testament, through the New Testament accounts and, finally, to her Assumption into heaven.

Baum notes that the section's theological focus is on Mary as mother of the Lord. "The divine motherhood is the great dignity to which Mary has been called and the basis for everything else that is said about her in the Scriptures and the Church," he writes.¹⁴

Mary was predestined by God to be the mother of the Lord, and it was the Father's will that she give her consent to the Incarnation. And so just as a woman (Eve) helped bring death to man, so a woman (Mary) would help bring life. From the first instant of her conception, Mary was graced with a unique holiness and was impeded by no sin as she freely cooperated in the work of man's salvation through faith and obedience. "Rightly, therefore, the Fathers see Mary not merely as passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of man's salvation through faith and obedience" (LG 56).

Mary appears prominently in the public life of Jesus. By her intercession, she brought about the beginning of His miracles. She endured even the intensity of her Son's suffering, associating herself with His sacrifice in her mother's heart and lovingly consenting to His sacrifice (LG 58). At Pentecost, she implored the gift of the Spirit. And, finally, preserved free from the stain of original sin, she was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and is exalted Queen over all things (LG 59).

¹⁴Baum, p. 27.

III. The Blessed Virgin and the Church

This section begins by quoting the apostle Paul in 1 Tim. 2:5-6 that Christ is the one Mediator between God and men. In fact, Baum contends that this section, which portrays Mary as type and image of the Church, has as its overriding principle the unique mediation of Jesus.¹⁵

Mary's function as mother of men does not diminish the "unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power" (LG 60). By her cooperation in Christ's work, she is "a mother to us in the order of grace" (LG 61). She still has this office and by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. She is therefore invoked in the Church "under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix." A disclaimer is quickly added: "This, however, is so understood that it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator" (LG 62).

By reason of her divine motherhood, she is united with her Son and with the Church. She is a type of the Church "in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ" (LG 63).

By receiving the Word of God in faith, the Church, too, becomes a mother who brings forth sons conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God. She is a virgin who keeps in purity the fidelity she has pledged to her spouse (LG 64).

¹⁵Ibid., p. 28.

IV. The Cult of the Blessed Virgin in the Church

As "Our Lady" turns to consideration of the veneration of the Blessed Virgin, its theological focus once again is Mary's divine motherhood.

Mary, who has been exalted to a place second only to her Son, is rightly honored by a special cult. This cult, for all its uniqueness, differs essentially from the cult of adoration offered the Trinity (LG 66). The Council urges that especially the liturgical cult be "generously fostered," but warns against abuses, whether "false exaggeration" or "too summary an attitude." The duties and privileges of the Blessed Virgin should always refer to Christ, and care should be taken so as not to mislead "separated brethren" about the true doctrine of the Church (LG 67).

V. Mary, Sign of True Hope and Comfort for the Pilgrim People of God

Mary, in the glory she now possesses in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. She is thus "a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God" (LG 68).

The text ends on something of an ecumenical and missionary note: "The entire body of the faithful pours forth urgent supplications to the Mother of God and of men that she, who aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers, may now, exalted as she is above all angels and saints, intercede before her Son in the fellowship of all the saints, until all families of people, whether they are honored with the title of Christian or whether they still do not know the Saviour, may be happily gathered together in peace and harmony into one People of God, for the

glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity" (LG 69).

Pope Paul VI

It did not take Pope Paul VI long after the promulgation of Lumen Gentium to make a significant contribution of his own to contemporary Roman Catholic Mariology. In his closing address to the session of Vatican II that had approved the constitution, the Pope proclaimed the Virgin Mary "Mother of the Church, that is to say of all the people of God, of the faithful as well as of the pastors, who call her the most loving Mother."¹⁶

Certainly, this does not seem out of line with the language of "Our Lady." As we have seen, Chapter VIII of Lumen Gentium speaks of Mary as "mother of men, and most of all those who believe" (LG 54). It quotes St. Augustine saying that "she is clearly the mother of the members of Christ. . ." (LG 53). It said that by her cooperation in Christ's work, she is "a mother to us in the order of grace" (LG 61). And finally, it again addresses her as "Mother of God and of men, . . . who aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers. . ." (LG 69).

But it was the Pope, not the Council, who actually proclaimed the title for Mary. In fact, the Council had debated whether or not to refer to Mary as "Mother of the Church" in the very title of Chapter VIII. The fathers finally--and consciously--declined to do so. Otto Semmelroth writes that "the strong feelings that were engaged may well have led the Pope--once the majority had declined to accept the title

¹⁶Pope Paul VI, p. 387.

'Mother of the Church'--to offer the others some satisfaction by personally proclaiming the title in his address at the close of the third session."¹⁷

In any case, Paul VI tells the Council fathers, "We trust then, that with the promulgation of the Constitution on the Church, sealed by the proclamation of Mary as Mother of the Church, that is to say of all the faithful and all the pastors, the Christian people may, with greater ardor, turn to the Holy Virgin and render to her the honor and devotion due her."¹⁸

Paul VI did his part to promote devotion to the Virgin, who he

¹⁷Semmelroth, p. 286. Semmelroth (pp. 292-293) offers this explanation for the Council's hesitance at the title, even though it had clearly stated that Mary is the spiritual mother of the faithful: ". . . 'Church' can be taken in various senses. St. Augustine himself says that the Church plays the part of both mother and children. Insofar as she is a whole, he says, the Church is the mother; and in so far as she is the individuals in the Church, she is the children. As the saving communion that exists before the individuals in her do, the Church is the spiritual mother in whose lap the individual faithful must be children if they would share the life of Christ's grace. By baptism, according to the most ancient tradition, they are reborn to the life of grace in this lap of the Church. In this sense, the Church herself is the spiritual mother of the faithful. And since the Catholic mind sees the Church as this community which precedes the individual, whereas the Reformation holds instead that the Church is the sum of many individuals, one can understand the hesitations there are about calling Mary the Mother of the Church (with the logical consequence, as one Father rather naughtily said on the floor of the Council, that our Lady would be the grandmother of individual Christians). Of course, if one takes the 'Church' to mean the sum of many individuals--which is not absolutely unthinkable from the Catholic point of view, indeed is done fairly often these days with theologians adopting an individualist approach to religion--then Mary, being the undoubted spiritual mother of Christians, can also be called Mother of the Church. The Constitution avoids using the title, for the sake of strict accuracy and because [Paragraph 63] . . . describes Mary in accordance with an ancient tradition as a type of the Church precisely in respect of the motherhood of both."

¹⁸Pope Paul VI, p. 388.

continued often to address as "Mother of the Church."

In his fourth encyclical, Christi Matri (1966), the Pope appeals for world peace against the backdrop of the war in Southeast Asia and encourages Marian devotion, particularly through the rosary.

Writing that peace must be obtained from the Prince of Peace, the Pope immediately continues, "The constant practice of the Church has been to fly to Mary his Mother, its ever present intercessor in times of uncertainty and fear."¹⁹ Because the Blessed Virgin is "Mother of the Church, its spiritual parent," it is "not in vain that during today's frightening troubles we place our hope in her." Praying the rosary, he writes, "has great power to repel evil and to ward off calamities, as the history of the Church clearly testifies."²⁰

The next year, Paul VI wrote an apostolic exhortation, Signum magnum (1967), on Mary, the Mother of the Church. His purpose was to "exhort all the Church's members to consecrate themselves again individually to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of the Church. . . ."²¹ The Pope writes that the faithful need not fear that reform of the liturgy in the wake of Vatican II will result either in any "diminution on the 'altogether singular' veneration that is due to the Blessed Virgin," or "obscure or lessen" worship of adoration due the

¹⁹Pope Paul VI, encyclical "Christi Matri" [Sept. 15, 1966], in Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts, International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1982), p. 1196.

²⁰Ibid., p. 1197.

²¹Pope Paul VI, apostolic exhortation "Signum magnum" [May 13, 1967], in Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts, International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), p. 1199.

Trinity.²²

The Pope cites two duties of "those who recognize in Christ's Mother a perfect expression of the Church": 1) to thank God for the great things He has done in her, and 2) to venerate her, because "in God's wise and gentle governance the free consent of Mary's will and her generously given efforts have contributed much to accomplishing the divine purposes and continue to contribute in bringing about human salvation."²³

The most extensive writing on Mary and Marian devotion by Pope Paul VI is his apostolic exhortation Marialis cultus (1974). "That Marian devotion should grow has been an object of our unceasing efforts ever since we were raised to the chair of Peter," the pope states in his opening sentence.²⁴ He then proceeds to review liturgical reforms since Vatican II, the connection between the liturgy and the Marian cultus, and guidelines for non-liturgical Marian devotion.

Marialis cultus is rich in traditional Marian themes, as well as in the newer emphasis on the Virgin as Mother of the Church. The document's tone and content are well summarized in a portion of its concluding section:

The Church's devotion to Mary forms part of the very nature of Christian worship. The honor always and everywhere paid to Mary--from Elizabeth's salutation of blessing (see Lk 1:42-45) to today's expressions of praise and petition--is a shining witness that the

²²Ibid., p. 1198.

²³Ibid., pp. 1198-1199.

²⁴Pope Paul VI, apostolic exhortation "Marialis cultus" [Feb. 2, 1974], in Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts, International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), p. 1204.

Church's own law of prayer (lex orandi) serves as an invitation to give firmer support in our consciousness to the law of faith (lex credendi). Conversely, the Church's law of faith requires that its law of prayer regarding Christ's Mother be everywhere in full effect. Devotion to Mary is deeply rooted in the revealed word of God and solidly supported in the following truths of Catholic teaching. The dignity of Mary is unique: she is "the Mother of God's Son, therefore the most beloved daughter of the Father and the repository of the Holy Spirit; by this gift of surpassing grace she stands far above all creatures in heaven and on earth."¹¹⁹ She cooperated in those events that were of the highest importance in the work of redemption that her Son accomplished. Hers is a holiness that, though full from the moment of her immaculate conception, yet increased more and more as she obeyed the Father's will and walked along the path of suffering (see Lk 2:34-35, 2:41-52; Jn 19:25-27) in faith, hope, and charity that grew without interruption. Hers is a unique role and place among the people of God, since she is at once the most exalted member, shining model, and loving Mother. Her intercession is unceasing and effective; because of it, even though assumed into heaven, she is near the faithful who call on her and she is near to those who do not even know they are her children. Finally, her glory ennoble the entire human race; in the wonderful verse of Dante Alighieri "You are that Woman who so ennoble human nature that its Creator did not disdain to become a human creature."¹²⁰ Mary does belong to our race, she is truly a daughter of Eve, although free of Eve's sin; she is truly our sister, who in an earthly life of humility and poverty shared fully in our own lot.²⁵

¹¹⁹LG no. 53:AAS 57 (1965) 58-59;ConstDecrDecl 192.

¹²⁰La Divina Commedia: Paradiso 23, 4-6.

It is Mary's place as a model of devotion for the Church, based on "the Church's view of her as the foremost instance and illustration of faith, charity, and absolute union with Christ," that provides the reason for "special relationships" between Mary and the liturgy, the pope writes.²⁶ In this regard, he enumerates a number of correspondences between Mary and the Church, both of which are "virgins":

²⁵Ibid., pp. 1225-1226.

²⁶Ibid., p. 1212.

(1) "Mary is the Virgin who listens, welcoming the word of God with faith. The faith we speak of was the condition of her becoming the Mother of God and the path to that exalted place." The Church follows Mary in this regard especially as it listens to God's word in the liturgy.²⁷

(2) "Mary is the Virgin who prays," as exemplified by her Magnificat, her intercession with Jesus at Cana, and in the Upper Room before Pentecost. The last instance makes it "right to see Mary praying in the infant Church and it remains right to see her praying now: although she has been received into heaven, she does not fail in her office of interceding and saving." The Church likewise praises God and intercedes for the salvation of the world.²⁸

(3) "Mary is the Virgin who is a mother." God willed that Mary's divine motherhood should be a figure of the Church, which also is a mother as it brings forth children of God through preaching and baptizing.²⁹

(4) ". . . Mary is the Virgin who makes her offering to God." Mary offers her Son first in the presentation at the temple and finally on Calvary, where the "association of Mother with Son in the work of redemption had its supreme moment. . . ." The Church continues the sacrifice of the cross is the eucharistic sacrifice.³⁰

Turning to forms of devotion other than the liturgical cultus,

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 1213.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., p. 1214.

Paul VI offers a series of principles for properly defining devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He says that Marian devotion must be clearly Trinitarian and Christological in nature; must give importance to the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, which in turn will highlight the bond between the Spirit and Mary, as well as their "joint influence on the Church"; and must bring out "the place Mary holds in the Church," adding that "Mary and the Church work together to bring forth Christ's Mystical Body."³¹

Just as Lumen Gentium expresses an ecumenical concern, so does Paul VI in Marialis cultus. "The ecclesial character in Marian devotion is the reason for the Church's concerns about this devotion and chief among these concerns today is the restoration of the unity of Christians," he writes.³² He adds that he hopes that the veneration of Mary "will, even if gradually, cease to be an obstacle and become rather an opening and, as it were, a meeting point for achieving the unity of all those who believe in Christ."³³

Perhaps that ecumenical concern is at least partially responsible for the pope's care in stating near the end of Marialis cultus that "Christ is the only way leading to the Father" and that He is "the supreme model on whose image his followers must pattern their life. . . ." He quickly adds, though, that "devotion to Mary, subordinated to devotion toward the divine Redeemer and related to it, possesses great power and efficacy in the pastoral sphere and for the

³¹Ibid., pp. 1216-1219.

³²Ibid., p. 1220.

³³Ibid., p. 1221.

renewal of the Christian life."³⁴

He also states that "[i]t is impossible to pay due honor to her who is full of grace without honoring divine grace itself, that is, God's friendship, his communion with the soul, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit." It is God's grace that conforms man to the image of Christ. At the same time, Marian devotion is a powerful help in the quest for the fullness of life.³⁵

"Mary the New Woman stands next to Christ the New Man, in whose mystery alone is light shed on the human mystery itself," the pope writes. "We receive a kind of pledge of assurance that the divine plan for human salvation has already been fulfilled in a person of the human race, that is, in Mary." Mary, he adds, "promises hope in place of anguish, communion in place of loneliness, peace in place of turmoil, gladness and beauty in place of boredom and weariness, the expectation of eternal realities in place of earthly craving, life in place of death."³⁶

Pope John Paul II

"Strengthened by the presence of Christ (cf. Mt 28:20), the Church journeys through time toward the consummation of the ages and goes to meet the Lord who comes," writes Pope John Paul II in his introduction to the encyclical Redemptoris Mater (1987). "But on this journey--and I wish to make this point straightaway--she proceeds along the path

³⁴Ibid., p. 1226.

³⁵Ibid., p. 1227.

³⁶Ibid.

already trodden by the Virgin Mary, who 'advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross' [Lumen Gentium 58]."³⁷

Lumen Gentium and Marialis cultus address the relationship of Mary both to Christ and to the Church. Emphasis on that same twofold relationship is evident in Redemptoris Mater,³⁸ which Pope John Paul II wrote in preparation for a Marian year in 1987 and 1988.

Redemptoris Mater emphasizes Mary's faith, her life as a pilgrimage of faith, and the model she provides for the pilgrim Church. The titles of the encyclical's three chapters (not including the introduction and conclusion) indicate its content: "Mary in the Mystery of Christ," "The Mother of God at the Center of the Pilgrim Church," and "Maternal Mediation."

The account of Mary's pilgrimage begins with the Annunciation, the moment of the Incarnation. The angel addresses Mary as "full of grace," which refers first to her eternal election as Mother of God's Son (additionally, to "all the supernatural munificence from which Mary

³⁷Pope John Paul II, "Redemptoris Mater," published as Mary: God's Yes to Man, with an Introduction by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and a Commentary by Hans Urs von Balthasar (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), pp. 45-46.

³⁸At 150,000 words, Redemptoris Mater "is the longest magisterial document ever devoted to the Virgin Mary, followed in descending order according to length by Marialis cultus (85,000 words), Ineffabilis Deus (41,000 words), Munificentissimus Deus (33,000 words) and Chapter 8 of Lumen Gentium (25,000 words)." Contenuti e Prospettive Dottrinali e Pastoralì (Roma: Pontificia Accademia Mariana Internazionale, 1988), p. 109, quoted in William Henn, "Interpreting Marian Doctrine," Gregorianum 70, 3 (1989):413, n. 1. (Ineffabilis Deus [1854] is the papal encyclical that defines the dogma of the Immaculate Conception; Munificentissimus Deus [1950] is the apostolic constitution that defines the dogma of the Assumption.)

benefits by being chosen and destined to be the Mother of Christ").³⁹

"The fullness of grace announced by the angel means the gift of God himself. Mary's faith, proclaimed by Elizabeth at the Visitation, indicates how the Virgin of Nazareth responded to this gift," writes the pope.⁴⁰

He continues, "The mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished when Mary uttered her fiat: 'Let it be to me according to your word', which made possible, as far as it depended upon her in the divine plan, the granting of her Son's desire.

"Mary uttered this fiat in faith."⁴¹

The blessing announced by Elizabeth--"Blessed is she who believed"--"reaches its full meaning when Mary stands beneath the Cross of her Son (cf. Jn 19:25)," the pope writes. Quoting Lumen Gentium [58], that by suffering with her Son and joining His sacrifice, Mary "faithfully preserved her union with her Son even to the Cross," John Paul II adds: "It is a union through faith--the same faith with which she had received the angel's revelation at the Annunciation."⁴²

By virtue of that faith, Mary became the mother of God's Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through faith, she also heard and pondered the Word of God. "Thus in a sense Mary as Mother became the first 'disciple' of her Son, the first to whom He seemed to say: 'Follow me', even before he addressed the call to the Apostles or to anyone else

³⁹"Redemptoris Mater," p. 59.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 66.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 68.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 77-78.

(cf. Jn 1:43)," he continues.⁴³

The significance of this is not only that Mary is the first disciple, but that as a disciple, her motherhood takes on deeper meaning. She is not merely a mother according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit as well, in the sense to which Jesus referred when He said, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:20-21).

St. John's account of the wedding at Cana, for example, "outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say Mary's solicitude for human beings, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs," the pope writes. Although the lack of wine is a small thing, the incident "has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ's messianic mission and salvific power."⁴⁴ The pope continues:

Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs, and sufferings. She puts herself "in the middle", that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she "has the right" to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary "intercedes" for mankind. And that is not all. As a mother she also wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested, that salvific power of his which is meant to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from the evil which in various forms and degrees weighs heavily upon his life. . . .

Another essential element of Mary's maternal task is found in her words to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." The Mother of Christ presents herself as the spokeswoman of her Son's will, pointing out those things which must be done so that the salvific

⁴³Ibid., pp. 84-85.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 87-88.

power of the Messiah may be manifested. At Cana, thanks to the intercession of Mary and the obedience of the servants, Jesus begins "his hour". At Cana Mary appears as believing in Jesus. Her faith evokes his first "sign" and helps to kindle the faith of the disciples.⁴⁵

At Cana, we first see Mary's maternal mediation on behalf of mankind, making her in the words of Lumen Gentium [62], "a mother to us in the order of grace." From there, John Paul II turns to another episode in John's Gospel that "confirms this motherhood in the salvific economy of grace at its crowning moment, namely when Christ's sacrifice on the Cross . . . is accomplished": the moment when Jesus gives Mary to be the mother of His disciple John, and John to be her son.⁴⁶ That act is more than mere solicitude toward His mother. Writes the pope:

The words uttered by Jesus from the Cross signify that the motherhood of her who bore Christ finds a "new" continuation in the Church and through the Church, symbolized and represented by John. In this way, she who as the one "full of grace" was brought into the mystery of Christ in order to be his Mother and thus the Holy Mother of God. . . . In accordance with the eternal plan of Providence, Mary's divine motherhood is to be poured out upon the Church, as indicated by statements of Tradition, according to which Mary's "motherhood" of the Church is the reflection and extension of the motherhood of the Son of God.⁴⁷

The pope concludes his first chapter by tying together the Annunciation, or the moment of the Incarnation, with the birth of the Church at Pentecost, in light of Jesus' words from the Cross:

. . . The person who links these two moments is Mary: Mary at Nazareth and Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem. In both cases her discreet yet essential presence indicates the path of "birth from the Holy Spirit". Thus she who is present in the mystery of Christ as Mother becomes--by the will of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit--present in the mystery of the Church. In the Church too she

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 88-89.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 93.

continues to be a maternal presence, as is shown by the words spoken from the Cross: "Woman, behold your son!"; "Behold, your mother."⁴⁸

In Chapter 2, "The Mother of God at the Center of the Pilgrim Church," John Paul II resumes making the connection between the Annunciation and Pentecost and reiterates and elaborates upon a number of themes we have already seen in Chapter 1: Mary "leads the way" [cf. Lumen Gentium 63] for the disciples in the Upper Room. The Annunciation and the Cross prepared the way for Pentecost.⁴⁹ Mary was the first to believe.⁵⁰ From the beginning, she belongs both to the mystery of Christ and to the mystery of the Church.⁵¹

Because of Mary's inseparable connection both with Christ and with the Church, the pope asks "why should we not all together look to her as our common Mother, who prays for the unity of God's family and who 'precedes' us all at the head of the long line of witnesses of faith in the one Lord, the Son of God, who was conceived in her virginal womb by the power of the Holy Spirit?"⁵² The pope concludes this chapter by quoting the Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (March 22, 1986, p. 97), which says in part: "'It is to [Mary] as Mother and Model that the Church must look in order to understand in its completeness the meaning

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 94.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 98.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 100.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 102.

⁵²Ibid., p. 110.

of her own mission.'"⁵³

The pope begins Chapter 3, "Maternal Mediation," by stating that "[t]he Church knows and teaches with St. Paul that there is only one mediator." He quotes Lumen Gentium [60]: "'The maternal role of Mary toward people in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power.'" He adds that "[Mary's mediation] is mediation in Christ."⁵⁴

"In effect, Mary's mediation is intimately linked with her motherhood," the pope writes.⁵⁵ By virtue of being "left by her Son as Mother in the midst of the infant Church: 'Behold your mother,'" this Mother and the Church begin to develop a special bond. She could not but pour out her maternal self-giving upon the Church. "After her Son's departure, her motherhood remains in the Church as maternal mediation: interceding for all her children, the Mother cooperates in the saving work of her Son, the Redeemer of the world."⁵⁶

Turning to "Mary in the life of the Church and of every Christian," John Paul II writes, "Linking itself with Tradition, Vatican II brought new light to bear on the role of the Mother of Christ in the life of the Church."⁵⁷ The cult of Mary "expresses the profound link which exists between the Mother of Christ and the Church," he adds. Mary is a "permanent model" for the Church, which, too, is called

⁵³Ibid., p. 122.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 123.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 124.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 129.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 135.

"mother and virgin."⁵⁸

While Mary is a model for the Church in purity of faith, in hope and in love, she is more than only a model as to the Church's "motherhood in the Holy Spirit," that is, in its "generating people to a new and immortal life," writes John Paul II,

for, "with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development" of the sons and daughters of Mother Church. 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, as the Mother of that Son whom the Father "placed as the firstborn among many brethren".^{128 59}

¹²⁸Lumen Gentium, 63.

Echoing the words of Lumen Gentium [61], John Paul II writes that Mary's new motherhood is spiritual, "in the order of grace," because it "implores the gift of the Spirit who raises up the new children of God, redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ: that Spirit whom together with the Church Mary too received on the day of Pentecost."⁶⁰

It is the bond that exists between Mary and the Church that prompts his proclamation of a Marian Year, according to the pope. He notes that such a year was proclaimed in 1954 by Pope Pius XII to highlight Mary's holiness as expressed in the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and of the Assumption.⁶¹ For his part, John Paul II,

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 136.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 139-140.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 140.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 148.

following the course set by Vatican II, wants to emphasize Mary's "special presence . . . in the mystery of Christ and his Church."⁶²

The Marian Year, he writes, would begin at Pentecost [1987], a reminder of the Church's beginning and that Christ's Mother "constantly 'precedes' the Church in her journey through human history."⁶³ The year will end on the feast of the Assumption [1988], "in order to emphasize the 'great sign in heaven' spoken of by the Apocalypse. In this way we also wish to respond to the exhortation of the Council, which looks to Mary as 'a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God'."⁶⁴

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Probably the most recent official document of the Roman Catholic Church to include a treatment of Marian theology is the new Catechism of the Catholic Church (announced in late 1992, but not available in English until 1994). This "universal" catechism is the first to be published by Rome since the Catechism of the Council of Trent in 1566.

One is struck by the immediate prominence the new catechism gives to the Virgin Mary. For example, the apostolic constitution by Pope John Paul II for the catechism's publication serves as a preface and, as noted in the introduction to this paper, concludes with a prayer for the "powerful intercession" of the Virgin Mary, "Mother of the Incarnate

⁶²Ibid., p. 149.

⁶³Ibid., p. 151.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 153.

Word and Mother of the Church."⁶⁵ Then, at the beginning of Part 1 of the text itself is a reproduction of the earliest known image of the Virgin, a fragment of a third-century fresco in a Roman catacomb. The explanation accompanying the illustration says, "Mary brought him [the Son of God] into the world and gave him to all mankind. For this reason she is the purest image of the Church (cf. §967)."⁶⁶

Paragraph 967, referenced by the explanation to the illustration, states:

By her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity. Thus she is a "preeminent and . . . wholly unique member of the Church"; indeed, she is the "exemplary realization" (typus)⁵⁰⁸ of the Church.⁶⁷

⁵⁰⁸LG [Lumen Gentium] 53; 63.

The catechism then goes on to say that "her role . . . goes still further" and quotes Lumen Gentium 61, which says that "she is a mother to us in the order of grace."⁶⁸

Those paragraphs are part of a larger four-page section titled "Mary--Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church." The catechism says that the role of Mary over against the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ. She suffers with her Son and is associated with His sacrifice, it says, citing Lumen Gentium 58.⁶⁹ Quoting Lumen

⁶⁵Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 6.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 252.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 251.

Gentium 62, it says that by her intercession, Mary continues to obtain for us the gifts that assure our eternal salvation, which is why she is invoked in the Church under such titles as advocate, helper and mediatrix.⁷⁰ The Virgin is legitimately honored by the Church with a special cult that finds expression in Marian prayer, such as the Rosary. And finally, she is an "eschatological icon of the Church."⁷¹

Elsewhere in the catechism, we are told that Mary's faith never vacillated; "and so the Church venerates in Mary the purest realization of faith."⁷² We also read of the predestination of Mary to be the Mother of the Son of God, of her Immaculate Conception, and that by God's grace, she never sinned.⁷³

"Jesus is Mary's only son, but her spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom indeed he came to save," the catechism says, then quotes Lumen Gentium 63. Reference is made to the same and the following paragraph of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church when the catechism says, "At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church."⁷⁴

There are no real surprises in the new catechism regarding the Blessed Virgin. It follows closely the course set by Vatican II and, in fact, seems in many places to take as much (or more) space quoting Lumen Gentium as it does with commentary that was originally written for the

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 252.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 253.

⁷²Ibid., p. 40.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 122-124.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 127-128.

catechism itself.

Evaluation

Not long after Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses, the cult of the Virgin Mary became an issue in the Reformation. "For the Reformers, Mariology could not possibly be a side issue since it touched so directly on their common main theme, the redemption by God in Jesus Christ," notes Heiko Oberman.⁷⁵

Roman Catholic scholar Elizabeth Johnson provides a fair summary of the Reformers' concern as regards the mediatorial role the Virgin had assumed during the Middle Ages. She writes:

The first generation of Protestant Reformers, all originally Catholic and thus nourished in a spiritual environment that stressed the cult of Mary, did not abandon Marian devotion completely. They did interpret its excesses critically as deviations from the central gospel message that human beings are saved by Jesus Christ through faith alone. Martin Luther said in later years that he had been taught the prevalent view that Christ was an angry judge and Mary the throne of grace through which redemption was mediated. When confronted with his own anxiety over salvation, Luther had rediscovered Christ as the merciful and sole mediator of salvation. . . . Among Luther, Calvin, and the other reformers, Mary's role as the Virgin Mother of Jesus continued to be honored, whereas reliance on her mediation and the practice of invoking her help were banned as taking honor away from Christ, who alone mediates salvation.⁷⁶

After the first generation of Reformers, "Marian devotion in the Protestant churches all but disappeared, a casualty of both the new form of evangelical spirituality introduced by the reformers and the continuing polemic with the Roman Catholic Church, which continued to

⁷⁵Heiko A. Oberman, The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 20.

⁷⁶Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Marian Devotion in the Western Church," in Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 410, 411.

honor Mary with ever-increasing fervor," Johnson writes.⁷⁷ In other words, the gap between the Protestant and Catholic attitudes toward Mary continued to widen.

After nearly seven years and fourteen sessions of meetings, the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue concluded a discussion of "The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary" in February 1990. A "Common Statement" and fifteen background papers were published in 1992.⁷⁸

The dialogue document provides a quick review of how the rift over their respective theologies of Mary and the saints grew after the Reformation between Lutherans and Roman Catholics:

After the Council of Trent, Lutheran and Catholic attitudes toward the saints and Mary increasingly diverge. Catholic leaders encouraged veneration of the saints and Mary, and Catholic piety was reflected in many canonizations, new saints' feasts and renewed Marian devotion. Lutherans, meanwhile, "viewed these developments with a mixture of suspicion and benign neglect before 1854 [the year that Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception], but then reacted with sharp polemics" (§§182, 183). Anti-Catholic polemics were revived again in 1950 with papal definition of the dogma of the Assumption (§197).

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65), however, "attempted to deal with Christ, the saints, and Mary with sensitivity to Protestant concerns" and so addressed this teaching in its Dogmatic Constitution on

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 411.

⁷⁸H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1992). References to the "Common Statement" will be cited by paragraph number.

the Church (Lumen Gentium) (§202). "Mary in the midst of the community of saints in heaven; the saints as sharing the koinonia of all the people of God; and the whole church itself reflecting the light of Christ as the moon does that of the sun--such is the relationship set up by Vatican II among the one Mediator, the saints, and Mary" (§211).

Vatican II placed its discussion of the Blessed Virgin within the context of the Church. As we have seen in our review, the Roman Catholic magisterium has continued to discuss Mary in this same context ever since.

Lumen Gentium made it clear that Mary is a member of the Church. She is also its type and model in faith and love (LG 53) and as virgin and mother (LG 63), for the Church is a virgin by virtue of keeping the faith pledged to her spouse and a mother who brings forth sons of God through preaching and baptizing (LG 64).

Pope John Paul II emphasizes, however, that Mary in Lumen Gentium (63) is "much more" than type and model of the Church,

for, "with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development" of the sons and daughters of Mother Church. 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, as the Mother of that Son whom the Father "placed as the firstborn among many brethren".^{128 79}

¹²⁸ Lumen Gentium, 64.

So the Church not only has attributes in common with Mary and seeks to follow her example, but it owes its very existence to her.

⁷⁹John Paul II, "Redemptoris Mater," pp. 139-140.

That is what it means for her to be "Mother of the Church."

What John Paul II refers to as "maternal mediation" is evident in Vatican II and in Pope Paul VI.

In Lumen Gentium, we are told that Mary's consent to the Incarnation was necessary (LG 56); that she cooperated in her Son's redemptive work "by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity" and so is a "mother to us in the order of grace" (LG 61); and that through her intercession, she "continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation." Moreover, the Blessed Virgin is invoked under such titles as "Mediatrix" because she cares for the faithful by her "maternal charity" (LG 62).

Citing Lumen Gentium 56, Pope Paul VI writes that "the free consent of Mary's will and her generously given efforts have contributed much to accomplishing the divine purpose and continue to contribute to bringing about human salvation."⁸⁰ In "Marialis cultus," he writes that even though she is in heaven, Mary "does not fail in her office of interceding and saving."⁸¹

It is important to note that in many instances, such declarations of Mary's mediation are accompanied by disclaimers that nothing said of her or her role in salvation is to be understood as impinging on the sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ. Says Lumen Gentium 62, for example: "No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God

⁸⁰Pope Paul VI, "Signum magnum," pp. 1198-1199.

⁸¹Pope Paul VI, "Marialis cultus," p. 1213.

is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source."

The Roman Catholic magisterium is to be commended for recognizing the threat that its Marian pronouncements have made to the sole mediatorship of Christ, but its disclaimers to the contrary do little to diminish concerns in that regard. Regardless of sincerity, to declare that Roman Catholic Mariology does not detract from the sole mediation of Christ does not make it so.

Neither has the apparent ecumenical sensitivity of Vatican II and Lumen Gentium meant a retreat from such Marian doctrines as the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, from Marian devotion, or from invocation of the Blessed Virgin or reliance on her intercession.

Among continuing "divergences" cited by the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue that explored "The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary" are intercession, invocation, mediation and the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption.

The dialogue participants accurately identify the real root of the problem regarding the issue of whether or not deceased saints intercede with God on behalf of Christians still living on earth, namely, that "the dispute comes down in great part to the sources of Christian doctrine and the principles of interpretation" (§78). The differing sources for Catholic and Lutheran doctrine are clearly stated:

. . . For their confidence in the prayers of the saints in heaven Catholics rely not simply on biblical texts but also, as stated elsewhere, on the sense of the faithful, on ancient and approved liturgical prayers, on the explicit teaching of popes and councils, and on theological reasoning from the biblical data [§78]. . . .

Lutherans point to the paucity of information provided by Holy Scripture concerning the state of the dead between their death and the end-time. Like Catholics, Lutherans confess that God gives life to the dead in Christ. Lutherans grant that the saints in heaven and Mary intercede for the church in general (Ap⁸² 21:9) or at least perhaps do so (SA⁸³ 2:2:26), but in neither alternative do they find any decisive ground for affirming that the departed are aware of prayers addressed to them (Ap 21:9, 12, 27; SA 2:2:26) [§79].

Catholics draw their doctrine from Scripture and tradition, Lutherans from Scripture alone. The differing sources of doctrine go far in explaining the differences over intercession. Scripture simply does not say whether or not the saints and Mary are aware of the prayers of those still alive on the earth or intercede for them.

Says the Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

Our opponents teach that we should put our trust in the invocation of the saints, though they have neither a Word of God nor an example from Scripture for this. They apply the merits of the saints in the same way as the merits of Christ and thus transfer to the saints the honor that belongs to Christ. Therefore we cannot accept either their ideas about venerating the saints or their practice of praying to them. We know that we must put our trust in the intercession of Christ because only this has God's promise [Ap 21:31].⁸⁴ (Emphasis mine.)

The Apology maintains that only the intercession of Christ has God's promise. This assertion is an application of the sola Scriptura principle. Only a few paragraphs earlier, the Apology applied that principle to invocation of the saints when it stated, "But our Confession [the Augsburg Confession] affirms only this much, that Scripture does not teach us to invoke the saints or to ask their help"

⁸²Apology of the Augsburg Confession.

⁸³Smalcald Articles.

⁸⁴Theodore C. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 233.

(Ap 21:10). If Scripture does not teach a doctrine, the Lutheran Confessions are consistent in insisting that neither should the church teach it.

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has pointed out that the Confessions "ask two questions concerning a given doctrine or practice: (1) What does it do to the Gospel of God's free grace toward sinners in Jesus Christ? (2) Does it have Biblical foundation?" Thus, it continued, "the Apology rejects invocation of saints both on the grounds that it robs Christ of His honor (XXI, 14) and on the ground that it is 'without proof from Scripture' (XXI, 10)."⁸⁵

For Lutherans, a doctrine taught as the Word of God, but which cannot be proved from Scripture, is just as unscriptural as a doctrine that is contrary to a clear teaching of Scripture. And to teach as the Word of God a doctrine not found in Scripture is to teach contrary to the Gospel, because it is for the sake of the Gospel that God has given us Holy Scripture.⁸⁶ (Moreover, to posit as the object of faith something that is less than certain cannot lead to certainty in faith, but only to uncertainty.)

The Augsburg Confession states that

. . . it cannot be proved from the Scriptures that we are to invoke saints or seek help from them. "For there is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), who is the only saviour,

⁸⁵The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 7.

⁸⁶For a discussion of the interrelationship between Scripture and the Gospel, see the CTCR report, Gospel and Scripture.

the only high priest, advocate, and intercessor before God (Rom. 8:34). He alone has promised to hear our prayers. Moreover, according to the Scriptures, the highest form of divine service is sincerely to seek and call upon this same Jesus Christ in every time of need. "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).⁸⁷

One can only wonder, then, whether it is in fact even possible to safeguard the sole mediatorship of Christ while at the same time encouraging invocation of Mary or other saints. We are warned in the Apology that invoking the saints to ask their help is a dangerous practice.⁸⁸ The Confutation required invocation and applied the merits of the saints to others, making them "mediators and propitiators." The Apology continues, "Even though they distinguish between mediators of intercession and mediators of redemption, they obviously make the saints mediators of redemption."⁸⁹ Even to call the saints "mediators of intercession," says the Apology, "obscures the work of Christ and transfers to the saints the trust we should have in Christ's mercy."⁹⁰

Participants in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on Mary and the saints identify the two modern Marian dogmas--the Immaculate Conception, defined in 1854, and the Assumption, defined in 1950--as the two most difficult areas regarding Mary (§86). Lutherans object to the Immaculate Conception based on the assertion in the Augsburg Confession (2:1) "that all descendants of Adam and Eve except Christ are 'conceived and born in sin'; that Scripture nowhere teaches that Mary was born

⁸⁷AC 21:2-4.

⁸⁸Cf. Ap 21:7.

⁸⁹Ap 21:14.

⁹⁰Ap 21:15.

without sin; and that "the definition itself was an unwarranted assertion of papal authority" (§87). Similar Lutheran objections are raised to the dogma of the Assumption (§§88, 89). The Lutheran Confessions are silent about both (§§87, 89).

Again, it is contrary to Scripture to teach as God's truth a doctrine that is not firmly grounded and clearly taught in Holy Scripture.⁹¹

The two Marian dogmas deserve one additional comment. In defining them, Popes Pius IX and Pius XII included anathemas against any who do not accept their teaching. Pius IX wrote, for example:

Hence, if anyone shall dare--which God forbid!--to think otherwise than as has been defined by Us, let him know and understand that he is condemned by his own judgment; that he has suffered shipwreck in the faith; that he has defected from the unity of the Church; and that, furthermore, by his own action he incurs the penalties established by law if he should dare to express in words or writing or by any other outward means the errors he thinks in his heart.⁹²

By such words and the assertion of papal infallibility, the Catholic Church has bound the consciences of the faithful to doctrines that most Catholics freely admit are not taught in Holy Scripture. That constitutes an attack on Christian freedom. As such, the papal definitions of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, maintained still by the post-conciliar Roman Catholic magisterium, go to the very heart of the Gospel.

⁹¹The Catholic participants in this dialogue acknowledge that neither the Immaculate Conception nor the Assumption "is taught as such in Scripture or in early patristic tradition" (§88).

⁹²"*Ineffabilis Deus*" in William J. Doherty and Joseph P. Kelly, compilers and arrangers, Papal Documents on Mary (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954), p. 26.

Conclusion

There has been a unity in official documents from the Roman Catholic magisterium dealing with the Blessed Virgin Mary since Vatican II. The popes and the new Catechism of the Catholic Church have all treated the Mother of God in the context of the Church. At the same time, they have maintained a link with tradition, incorporating intercession, invocation and the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption into the newer context.

Moreover, there is no question that Lumen Gentium set the current course for Roman Catholic Mariology. While Popes Paul VI and John Paul II have elaborated on Lumen Gentium (respectively proclaiming the Marian title "Mother of the Church" and citing Jesus' words from the Cross to His mother and His disciple John as the source of Mary's responsibility for the people of God, for example), they clearly ground their Marian writings in Vatican II. That is obvious from the references to Lumen Gentium in the footnotes to those writings.⁹³

There are positive attributes to post-conciliar Mariology. Ecumenical concerns, efforts to mitigate any encroachment by Mary on the sole mediatorship of Christ, an emphasis on Mary's faith, and clear statements that Mary, too, is among the redeemed, for example, are to be commended.

Still, the magisterium continues to make statements that direct the attention of the faithful to the care of Mary, that uphold teachings clearly contrary to Scripture, that attribute to Mary as a cause of

⁹³Of 147 footnotes in John Paul's encyclical "Redemptoris mater," for example, 83 refer to Lumen Gentium.

salvation functions that belong properly to the Holy Spirit, and that do in fact detract from Christ as sole Mediator between God and man.

Divisions between Rome and the churches of the Reformation over Mary remain serious.

At the root of these divisions and perhaps the greatest obstacle to true church-uniting agreement on the role of the Blessed Virgin is the fact that Catholics and Lutherans draw their doctrine from different sources--Catholics from Scripture and Tradition, Lutherans from Scripture alone.

The Lutheran participants in the dialogue on Mary and the saints acknowledge the serious nature of this problem in their concluding "reflections":

We are alert to the fact that the question of Scripture and tradition lies behind much of what still separates Lutherans and Roman Catholics concerning the saints and Mary. We already signaled the importance of this question in our first round of dialogue (L/RC 1: p. 32). It was fundamental for our dialogue on Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church (L/RC 6). In the present round of dialogue on the saints and Mary we have again discovered the need to investigate biblical extension and magisterial tradition (Lutheran Reflections, §§10-12; CS §100).⁹⁴

The ninth round of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, completed in September 1992, did in fact treat this very issue. The dialogue statement, "The Word of God: Scripture and Tradition," says participants found seven "significant points of agreement," but also three principal remaining differences: Lutherans hold to Scripture alone as the ultimate norm by which traditions must be judged, while Catholics hold to Scripture and living apostolic tradition together as norm; Lutherans deny the Catholic belief that the church's teaching authority can speak

⁹⁴Anderson, pp. 131-132.

infallibly; and the two communions differ in their understanding of the development of doctrine.⁹⁵

That is not to say that Lutherans and Roman Catholics should give up on attempts to reach God-pleasing unity on such issues as the authority of Scripture and the proper role of the Mother of God. Such issues represent a continuing challenge, for we have a Scriptural mandate to seek agreement in confession of the apostolic and catholic faith. That challenge ought not be ignored.

⁹⁵Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX, "The Word of God: Scripture and Tradition," January 1993, pp. 41-42. (Typewritten.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbott, Walter M., ed. The Documents of Vatican II. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966.
- _____. "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." The Documents of Vatican II. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966.
- Anderson, H. George; J. Francis Stafford; and Joseph A. Burgess, eds. The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1992.
- Baum, Gregory. "The Constitution of the Church." Journal of Ecumenical Studies 2 (Winter 1965):1-30.
- Benko, Stephen. "A Disappointing Marian Development." The Christian Century 84 (Jan. 18, 1967):79-80.
- Carroll, Eamon R. "Mary and the Church: Trends in Marian Theology Since Vatican II." New Catholic World 229 (November-December 1986):248-250.
- Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests. Translated by John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan. New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1934.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church. Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994.
- De Fiore, Stefano. "Mary in Postconciliar Theology." In Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives, 3 vols., 1:469-539. Edited by René Latourelle. Translated by Leslie Wearne. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.
- Doheny, William J., and Joseph P. Kelly, compilers and arrangers. Papal Documents on Mary. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954.
- Flanagan, Donal. The Theology of Mary. Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1976.
- Flannery, Austin, ed. Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents. New revised edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992.
- Henn, William. "Interpreting Marian Doctrine." Gregorianum 70 (1989): 413-437.

Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe. "The Council and Mary." Christianity Today 12 (Dec. 8, 1967):7-10.

International Commission on English in the Liturgy. Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts. Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982.

John Paul II, Pope. "Fidei depositum." In Catéchisme de L'Église Catholique, pp. 5-9. Ottawa: Conférence des Évêques catholiques du Canada, 1993.

_____. "Redemptoris Mater." In Mary: God's Yes to Man, pp. 43-158. Introduction by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Commentary by Hans Urs von Balthasar. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. "Marian Devotion in the Western Church," In Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, pp. 392-414. Edited by Jill Raitt. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988.

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972.

Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX. "The Word of God: Scripture and Tradition." January 1993. (Typewritten.)

Meyer, Harding. "The Ecumenical Unburdening of the Mariological Problem: A Lutheran Perspective." Journal of Ecumenical Studies 26 (Fall 1989):681-696.

Miller, Frederick L. "The Marian Orientation of Spirituality in the Thought of Pope John Paul II." Communio 17 (Winter 1990):566-579.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Behold Your Mother: A Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1973.

Oberman, Heiko A. The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective. Introduction by Thomas F. O'Meara. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.

Paul VI, Pope. "Christi Matri" (1966). In Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts, pp. 1196-1198. Edited by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982.

_____. "Closing Address of Pope Paul VI, Nov. 21, 1964." Appendix to Xavier Rynne, The Third Session: The Debates and Decrees of Vatican Council II September 14 to November 21, 1964. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965.

_____. "Marialis cultus" (1974). In Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979, pp. 1204-1227.

- _____. "Signum magnum" (1967). In Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979, pp. 1198-1200.
- Rynne, Xavier. The Third Session: The Debates and Decrees of Vatican Council II September 14 to November 21, 1964. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965.
- Semmelroth, Otto. "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." In Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, 1:285-296. Edited by Herbert Vorgrimler. Translated by Richard Strachan. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967.
- Tappert, Theodore C., ed. The Book of Concord. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.
- Vollert, Cyril. A Theology of Mary. New York: Herder and Herder, 1965.
- Von Allmen, Jean Jacques. "Remarks Concerning The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, Lumen Gentium." Journal of Ecumenical Studies 4 (Fall 1967):650-683.
- Vorgrimler, Herbert, ed. Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Vol. 1. Translated by Lalit Adolphus, Kevin Smyth, and Richard Strachen. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967.