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**“MOTHER OF THE CHURCH”:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE 1964 DECLARATION**

*Gloria Falcão Dodd, S.T.L.**



Mater Ecclesiae—visible from St. Peter's Square

Introduction

Just over twenty-five years ago, on May 13, 1981, Pope John Paul II was shot while he rode through the crowds in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. In gratitude to Our Lady for her intercession in saving his life, Pope John Paul II had a lovely mosaic entitled *Mater Ecclesiae* (Mother of the Church) built into the wall of the papal apartments overlooking St. Peter's Square in 1982.¹ It is a lovely but typical icon of Mary holding her infant Son, Jesus. Why did he entitle it "Mother of the Church?" It was partly because John Paul II saw the mission of his pontificate as the implementation of Vatican Council II.² At the council, in 1964, Pope Paul VI had declared Mary to be the "Mother of the Church." But what had prompted Paul VI to do this? There may have been many factors but at least one of them was the movement for the dogmatic definition of Mary's universal mediation. This presentation will highlight some of the movement's historical events that relate to Mary's motherhood of the Church, its theological presentation of this theme, and then conclude with some observations about how the declaration of the title "Mother of the Church" may point to future developments.

The Marian title, "Mother of the Church," has a long history in the Catholic Church. As early as the 1100s, Berengaud, Bishop of Trèves (d. 1125), called Mary the Mother of the Church.³ Rupert of Deutz (c. 1075-1130) described Mary as Mother of the Church and the Church as the mother of

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¹ Luigi Accattoli, *Man of the Millennium: John Paul II*, trans. Jordan Aumann (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2000), 100.

² In the opening address of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II declared that his first aim would be to promote and to implement the decrees of Vatican II and to bring to light all it contained. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 70 (1978): 920 ff. (hereafter AAS).

³ Matthew R. Mauriello, "Mary, Mother of the Church," The Mary Page, May 4, 2006, www.udayton.edu/mary/meditations/Mchrch.html, 1.

Mary.⁴ St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence (d. 1458), and St. Lawrence Justinian (d. 1455) also used this title.⁵ In 1895, Pope Leo XIII's Rosary encyclical, *Adjutricem populi*, described Mary at Pentecost in these words: "she was, in very truth, the Mother of the Church, the Teacher and Queen of the Apostles. . . ."⁶ Thus, the Catholic Church had been using the title for many years, but before Vatican Council II the Church had not singled out this title as anything notable.

I. A Movement for the Dogmatic Definition of Mary's Mediation

After the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 and the definition of papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council in 1870, some Catholic theologians were interested in finding another Marian doctrine for the pope to define as a new dogma. Pope Leo XIII's series of Rosary encyclicals in the 1880s and 1890s prompted René-Marie de La Broise (1860-1906), a French Jesuit, to publish in 1896 the first explicit proposal for a papal definition about Mary's role in the distribution of all graces, such as Mary's intercession or mediation of all graces or her spiritual motherhood.⁷ La Broise promoted this idea in more articles and in a joint paper given at the second international Marian Congress held in 1902 in Fribourg, Switzerland.⁸ Inspired by the presentations at this Congress, François Xavier Godts (1839-1928), a Belgian Redemptorist, published the first book promoting the dogmatic definition of

⁴ Gerard Philips, "Marie et l'Église: Un thème théologique renouvelé," in *Maria: Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, ed. Hubert du Manoir (8 vols.; Paris: Beauchesne, 1949-71), 7(1964):388-391.

⁵ Mauriello, "Mary," 1.

⁶ Leo XIII, *Adjutricem populi*, September 5, 1895, *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 28 (1895-96): 130, and in English, *17 Papal Documents on the Rosary*, trans. N.C.W.C. (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1980), 129.

⁷ René-Marie de La Broise, "Sur cette proposition: Toutes les grâces nous viennent par la Sainte Vierge," *Études* 68 (1896): 5-31.

⁸ René-Marie de La Broise, "La Sainte Vierge dans la pensée et le culte catholiques au XIXe siècle," *Études* 83 (1900): 289-311. René-Marie de La Broise and Alain du Bec-Boussay, "Les fêtes mariales de 1904," *Études* 91 (1902): 433-422, 598-617.

Mary's universal mediation, *De definibilitate mediationis universalis Deiparae*.⁹ Among the many arguments presented in this scholarly 451-page work, Godts quoted the passage from Leo XIII's *Adjutricem populi* to entitle one of his arguments, "The Completion of the work of redemption on earth—Mother of the Living, Teacher of the Apostles, *Mother of the infant Church*" (emphasis added).¹⁰ However, in this 1904 work, Godts does not develop this theme beyond a simple mention.

At the same time as these theologians were making their scholarly proposals, a Belgian Carmelite superior, Mother Madeleine of Jesus (1862-1946), was receiving mystical visions from Jesus asking for the dogmatic definition of his mother's mediation.¹¹ In 1906, when the newly appointed archbishop of Brussels, Désiré-Joseph Mercier (1851-1926), paid a courtesy call on Mother Madeleine and asked her what souvenir she would like from Rome, she asked him to speak to Pope Pius X about making this dogmatic definition.¹² Although Mercier simply replied that he would consider it, from 1907 to 1914, he began speaking publicly of Mary as "Distributrix of divine

⁹ Jean Sartenauer, "Godts (François-Xavier)," in *L'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Biographie Nationale*, vol. 34 (Brussels: Émile Bruylant, 1968), col. 416. F. X. Godts, *De definibilitate mediationis universalis Deiparae: Disquisitio theologica juxta doctrinam S. Alphonsi occasione jubilaevi semisaecularis definitionis Immaculati B.M.V. Conceptus* (Bruxellis: Missionum Exter. Prov. Belg. C.Ss.R., 1904), 5.

¹⁰ Godts, *De definibilitate*, 239: "*Completio operis redemptionis in terris.—Mater viventium, Magistra Apostolorum,—Mater Ecclesiae nascenti.*" (Note: Emphasis added phrases throughout this paper are shown in italics.)

¹¹ Manfred Hauke, Mary, "Mediatress of Grace": *Mary's Universal Mediation of Grace in the Theological and Pastoral Works of Cardinal Mercier*. Supplement. Mary at the Foot of the Cross—IV [Part B], 4th International Symposium on Marian Coredeposition, 2003 (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2004), 15-17.

¹² Under obedience to her confessor to clarify the origin of the devotion to Mary mediatrix, Mother Madeleine handwrote "Some historical notes about the Mediation of the Most Blessed Virgin" that she wanted to remain strictly confidential." See Mère Madeleine de Jésus, "Quelques notes historiques sur la médiation de la Très-Sainte Vierge," 56-page manuscript, found in the Mercier Archives in Malines and cited by carton and document: (here) Mercier IV, 36, "*Mère Madeleine de Jésus (Carmel d'Uccle)*," 1, 21-23.

graces,” “Mother of divine grace,” and “mediatrix.”¹³ After Germany invaded Belgium in 1914, Cardinal Mercier made a public vow to Jesus and to Mary. Although the details are uncertain, it appears that Mercier promised that if Belgium would be liberated from German occupation that he would at least “ask the pope to institute a special feast in honor of Mary mediatrix because it was to her all-powerful mediation that we entrusted the outcome of our prayers,” and, perhaps, even do all he could to bring about the dogmatic definition of Mary’s universal mediation.¹⁴

One way that Mercier fulfilled his vow was by writing pastoral letters. These brief excerpts do not do justice to his thought, but they show how he saw Mary’s universal mediation in relationship to her maternity of the Church. His April 25, 1915, Lenten pastoral letter, entitled *Devotion to Christ and to His Divine Mother*, concluded with an announcement that he had asked his priests to pray that the Church would define as a dogma the belief that “*Mary, Mother of the Church* is the universal Mediatrix of the human race.”¹⁵ Mercier also

¹³ Hauke, *Mary*, 34-35.

¹⁴ Four different versions of Mercier’s vow were found: 1. Mercier’s own account, considered to be the most accurate, as translated above, in Mercier to Benedict XV, April 8, 1920, Mercier IX, 34, “Teksten en muziek van Nieuw office en mis 1921”: “Dès que le malheur s’abatit sur notre Pays, . . . nous fîmes à Dieu une . . . promesse: . . . de demander à Votre Sainteté de nous accorder l’institution d’une fête spéciale en l’honneur de Marie Médiatrice, puisque c’était de sa médiation toute-puissante que nous attendions l’effet de nos prières”; 2. a letter by Mercier’s friend, Mgr. Van Ballaer to F-X. Godts, May 20, 1920—According to Godts, “Quelques souvenirs de mes relations avec le cardinal Mercier,” *La Voix du Rédempteur* (1926): 94-95: “Au début de la guerre il fit deux promesses à Dieu. . . la seconde de travailler à obtenir du Saint-Siège une fête spéciale en l’honneur de Marie-Médiatrice, avec messe et office propres”; 3. C. Cayaux, “Le cardinal Mercier et le culte de Marie,” *La vie diocésaine* 15 (1926): 93: “En 1914, le 8 septembre, lors d’un pèlerinage à Notre-Dame de la Garde à Lyon, Son Éminence renouvela sa promesse de s’employer à faire honorer Marie comme la Médiatrice du genre humain”; 4. John A. Gade, *The Life of Cardinal Mercier* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934), 224, described Mercier’s vow as promising “to get the Vatican to authorize as dogma the principle of the meditation [*sic*] of the Virgin Mary.”

¹⁵ Désiré Joseph Mercier, “La dévotion au Christ et à sa divine Mère,” in his *Per crucem ad lucem: Lettres, pastorales, discours, allocutions, etc.* (Paris: Bloud and Gay, n.d.), 89-122.

granted a 200-days indulgence (the maximum that cardinals could grant) to all who make the triple invocation:¹⁶ “Mary, Mother of Christ, pray for us. Mary, *Mother of the Church*, pray for us. Mary, universal Mediatrix of the human race, intercede for us.”¹⁷ On September 8, 1918, Mercier’s pastoral letter “Honoring Mary Mediatrix: The Angelus and the Holy Rosary” asked that everyone pray the glorious mysteries of the rosary for the intention of Jesus’ giving joy to the Church by glorifying Mary with the dogmatic proclamation of her universal mediation, and to conclude the rosary with his already indulgenced triple invocation of Mary.¹⁸ Thus, Mercier used his position as an archbishop to encourage people to pray for this intention. At the same time, on a theological level, Mercier entwined Mary’s motherhood of the Church with her universal mediation.

In 1915 and 1916, Mercier promoted four separate petitions to Pope Benedict XV asking for the dogmatic definition of Mary’s universal mediation. The first petition, signed in 1915 by the entire theology faculty of the Catholic University of Louvain, and the fourth petition, by the entire Belgian episcopacy, did not explicitly mention Mary’s motherhood of the Church.¹⁹ However, the second petition—by the male religious superiors of the Dominicans, Servites, Jesuits, Capuchins, Redemptorists, “Josephites,” and Benedictines in Belgium—described Mary’s mediation as her universal intercession of graces because of her cooperation in the Incarnation that established

¹⁶ Hauke, *Mary*, 39.

¹⁷ Mercier, “La dévotion,” 122.

¹⁸ Désiré Joseph Mercier, “Hommage à Marie médiatrice: L’Angelus—Le saint rosaire,” in his *Justice et charité: Lettres pastorales, discours, allocutions, etc.*, vol. 2 (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1919), 254: “Le troisième tiers, consacré à la méditation des mystères glorieux, sera spécialement dédié à Marie médiatrice. La paroisse demandera à Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ qu’il daigne accorder à l’Église la joie de voir glorifier Marie par la proclamation dogmatique de sa médiation universelle. . . . Marie, Mère du Christ, priez pour nous. Marie, Mère de l’Église, priez pour nous. Marie, médiatrice universelle du genre humain, intercédez pour nous” [200 j. ind. ch. f].

¹⁹ “Pétition de la Faculté de théologie de l’Université de Louvain au sujet de la définition dogmatique de la médiation universelle de la Sainte Vierge,” in *Annuaire de l’Université Catholique de Louvain* 79 (1915-1919) (Louvain, 924): 257-258, cited in Hauke, *Mary*, 3-6, 40-50 (esp. 4, n. 17; 44, n.188).

her as the mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church (i.e., the spiritual mother of Christ's adopted brothers).²⁰ The third petition—from the dean, canons, and clergy of the Metropolitan See of Malines—ended with Cardinal Mercier's hope for the dogmatic definition of the doctrine that the "God-bearer, *mother of the Church*, is the mediatrix of the whole human race."²¹ It is significant that two of these petitions asked for the definition of Mary's mediation because she is the Mother of the Church.

Mercier's efforts yielded results. In 1921, Pope Benedict XV made May 31st the feast of Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces, complete with its own Mass and Office, for Belgium and all the dioceses that would request it.²² Mercier promptly wrote to all of the bishops of the world inviting them to ask for the feast and the feast became almost universal.²³ In 1924, Pope Pius XI established three commissions—one in Belgium, one in Rome, and one in Spain—to study the definability of Mary's universal mediation of grace. The Belgian and Spanish Commission reports, published in 1985, presented long arguments in favor

²⁰ The petition was published in four parts with a commentary by P. Villada in a six-part article, "Por la definición dogmática de la mediación universal de la Santísima Virgen," *Razon y fe* 45 (1916): 169-182; 46 (1916): 63-81, 439-458; 47 (1917): 162-177; 48 (1917): 5-22, 319-340. Villada, "Definición dogmática," *Razon y fe* 45 (1916): 170, citing the Belgian religious, "Beatissime," "Ita celeberrimus ille, ac inter Virginis Matris praecones facile princeps, doctrinam de Maria 'generis humani Mediatrice' paucis definiebat," and *Razon y fe* 48 (1917): 319, "Ad laudem et gloriam Beatissime Virginis Mariae tuum in Illam, Matrem Christi, Matrem Ecclesiae, amorem supplices exoramus ad pedes Sanctitatis Tuae provoluti, maxima spe adducti fore ut aliquando Beatitudo Tua, infallibili auctoritate, si placuerit, Virginem Matrem Mediatricem universalem generis humani apud Filium adese pronunciet."

²¹ Two page typescript, Belgian clergy, "Beatissime Pater," Mercier IX, 37, "Snertekende smeekbede van dekens 1921, 1-2": "Eminentissimus Cardinalis Mercier . . . confidenter rogat, ut suis suspiriis et ad Deum supplicationibus abbrevient tempus, quo divinae Providentiae placuerit ceu dogma fidei definire praefatam doctrinam, nimirum Deiparam, matrem Ecclesiae, universalem esse generis humani Mediatricem."

²² René Laurentin, "En marge de la définition du dogme de l'Assomption: Intuitions du Cardinal Mercier," *Vie spirituelle* 84 (1951): 518.

²³ "Appendice," Mémoires et rapports du Congrès marial (Sections d'expression française) tenu à Bruxelles, 8-11 Septembre 1921, vol. 2 (Brussels: *L'Action catholique*, n.d.), 653-654. *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, vol. 1: *Sacramentary*, trans. I.C.E.L. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 243.

of Mary's mediation, including her motherhood of the Mystical Body of Christ, but without explicitly calling her the Mother of the Church.²⁴ In 1924, Mercier organized a Marian Congress in Antwerp and wrote his most famous pastoral letter, "On the Universal Mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and 'True Devotion to Mary' as Expounded by Blessed Grignon de Montfort."²⁵ Mercier's letter talks of Mary's spiritual maternity of the mystical body of her divine Son but omits the logical conclusion of her motherhood of the Church.²⁶ In 1925, the Montfort Fathers sent out Mercier's letter to all the bishops of the world asking for both the dogmatic definition and St. Louis Marie de Montfort's canonization.²⁷ All together, 449 bishops signed the petition, including Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII.²⁸ Unfortunately, Mercier died in 1926, before Montfort's canonization took place (in 1947).²⁹

After Mercier's death, his disciples, mostly the former Belgian and Spanish Commission members, continued the movement for the definition of Mary's universal mediation. Reacting against the theological excess of a Belgian theologian, Joseph Lebon, in his description of Mary's grace as *de condigno*, and

²⁴ "Commissio Belgica: De Definibilitate Mediationis B.V. Mariae Tribuendae Disquisitio et Vota Belgicae Commissionis Pontificiae," *Marianum* 47 (1985): 79-176. "Commissio Hispanica," *Marianum* 47 (1985): 42-78.

²⁵ Désiré Joseph Mercier, "La médiation universelle de la Très Sainte Vierge Marie et la 'Vrai dévotion à Marie' selon l'esprit de Grignon de Montfort," in *Œuvres pastorales: Actes-allocutions-lettres*, tome VII (1er janvier 1922-27 à janvier 1926) (Louvain: Em. Waryn, 1929), 436-471.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mercier IX, 19, "Middelaarschap O.L. Vrouw Projecten." The bottom of the "Adhaesio" read: "Nota: Haec adhaesio mittatur: Sive: à son Eminence le Cardinal Mercier, Archevêque de Malines, Belgique, Malines. Sive: aux R.R.P.P. Montfortains, Maison de Marie Médiatrice, 127, Boulevard de Diest, Belgique, Louvain."

²⁸ These bishops' responses alluded to by Gade, *Life of Mercier*, 278, were found in the Mechelin Archives with three objections in six red binders with gold lettering on the front—"Documenta ab Episcopatu Missa Circa exoptatam definitionem dogmaticam universalis mediationis B.V. Mariae, canonizationemque Beati Ludovici Mariae a Montfort, ejusdem doctrinae perillustris praeconis." Eugenio Pacelli's signature was #185, dated July 12, 1925.

²⁹ Pius XII, "In sollemni canonizatione Beati Ludovici Mariae Grignon de Montfort, Confessoris, Die XX Mensis Iulii A. MCMXLVII," in *Vaticana Basilica peracta*, July 20, 1947, *AAS* 39 (1947): 331.

therefore the same type as Christ's grace, Werner Goossens, a Belgian priest, and Heinrich Lennerz, a German Jesuit, were two notable opponents to the definition.³⁰ Answering the challenges about the types of grace that Mary could mediate, the proponents emphasized a Christotypical approach. In this approach, they compared Christ with Mary to say that just as Christ, the New Adam, was the one independent Mediator, Mary, as the New Eve, was the mediatrix of all grace, dependent upon Christ. The proponents lost sight of the movement's earlier connection between Mary's mediation and her motherhood of the Church. At the Third International Mariological-Marian Congress in 1958, some theologians thought that the Christotypical and ecclesiotypical approaches were contrary to each other. In the resulting controversy, the final assembly decided not to formulate any joint resolutions.³¹

In this atmosphere of theological division, Vatican Council II struggled to articulate the Church's understanding of Mary. After much argument, the Council Fathers voted in 1963 to include Mary in the document on the Church. Two mariologists—Carlo Balić, a Franciscan, probably representing a more Christotypical approach, and Gerard Philips, a Belgian mariologist from Louvain, known for an ecclesiotypical approach—had to revise the Marian document according to the new conciliar criteria: to use patristic rather than scholastic terminology; to include an ecclesiotypical approach; and to satisfy the majority of council fathers.³² Their compromise text

³⁰ Heinrich Lennerz, *De Beata Virgine* (Rome: Universitatis Gregorianae, 1930; 2nd ed., 1935; 3rd ed., 1939); "Considerationes de doctrina B. Virginis Mediatrix," *Gregorianum* 19 (1938): 419-444. Werner Goossens, *De cooperatione immediata Matris Redemptoris ad redemptionem objectivam: Quaestionis controversae per-pensatio* (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1939).

³¹ "a) De discussione finali theologorum," in *Maria et Ecclesia: Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani in civitate Lourdes anno MCMLVIII celebrati*, vol. I (Rome: Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1959), 214-219.

³² Carlos Balić, "El Capítulo VIII de la Constitución 'Lumen Gentium' comparado con el primer esquema de la B. Virgen Madre de la Iglesia," *Estudios Marianos* 27 (1966): 142. Cesare M. Antonelli, "Le rôle de Mgr. Gérard Philips dans la rédaction du Chapitre VIII," *Marianum* 55 (1993): 27. For details on the collaboration between Balić and Philips throughout the council and its preparation, see A. Niño Picado, "La intervención española en la elaboración del Capítulo VIII de la Constitución 'Lumen Gentium,'" *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 18 (1968): 103-310.

included the title *mother of the Church* and mentioned Mary's "cooperation and mediation in the order of grace" but omitted the title *mediatrix*. There was controversy over both titles—*mediatrix of all graces* and *mother of the Church*. How can Mary mediate all graces? If Mary is a member of the Church or a type or exemplar of the Church, then how can she be the mother of the Church? It seemed to imply that she would be mother of herself. On June 6, 1964, the Theological Commission reviewed this text and decided to include the shortened title of *mediatrix* instead of *mother of the Church*.³³ Thus, for the ecclesial dimension, *Lumen Gentium* simply explained Mary's role as the type and the exemplar of the Church (nos. 63-65).

However, in the closing Mass for the third session of the council, Pope Paul VI upset the compromise by solemnly proclaiming Mary to be the "Mother of the Church."³⁴ In his speech, the pope described Chapter 8 as the "crowning point" of *Lumen Gentium*, "an incomparable hymn in praise of the Virgin Mother of God. For this is the first time—and it moves Us deeply to say this—that any ecumenical council has taken the Catholic doctrine on the place that should be accorded to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, and has brought it all together in a single very extensive body of doctrine."³⁵ Paul VI then added even more to the official doctrine about Mary: "And so, for the glory of the Blessed Virgin and our own consolation, We declare Mary Most Holy, to be Mother of the Church, that is, of the whole Christ-

³³ Carlo Balić, "La doctrine sur la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie Mère de l'Église, et la Constitution 'Lumen Gentium' du Concile Vatican II," *Divinitas* 9 (1965): 470. Michael O'Carroll, "Vatican II and Our Lady's Mediation," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 37 (1970): 34-37.

³⁴ Paul VI, "Post duos menses," November 21, 1964, *AAS* 56 (1964): 1015. "Exploring the Mystery of the Church," trans. Austin Vaughan, *The Pope Speaks* 10 (1964-1965): 138. Michael O'Carroll, "Vatican II," in his *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, c1982), 354-356, and "Mediation," 244-245.

³⁵ *AAS* 56 (1964): 1014, for Latin, and *The Pope Speaks* 10 (1964-1965): 137-138, for the English translation.

ian people, both the faithful and the bishops, who call her a most loving Mother. We decree that from now on the whole of the Christian people should use this sweetest of names to pay more honor to the Mother of God and to pour out their prayers to her.”³⁶ Pope Paul VI’s proclamation of Mary as *Mother of the Church* corresponded to Mercier’s petitions from 1915 that had asked for the dogmatic definition of the doctrine that the “mother of God, the mother of the Church, is the universal Mediatrix of the human race.”³⁷ While Paul VI’s declaration was not what the movement’s proponents had envisioned, it was a clear and decisive development of Marian doctrine in the twentieth century.

II. The Theological Contribution of the Mother-of-the-Church Approach to Marian Mediation

The *Mother-of-the-Church* approach had adopted the title from Leo XIII’s encyclical *Adjutricem Populi*.³⁸ This viewpoint based Mary’s mediation on her motherhood of Christ that began at the Incarnation. From this perspective, Mary’s mediation was a maternal, universal intercession, with Christ’s mediation to God the Father, to obtain all the graces for each and every one of her children. Grace was clearly defined as spiritual life and growth in the mystical body of Christ. The understanding of grace was also crucial to this discussion because a spatial perspective could distort the reality into an image of Christ handing grace to Mary who then handed it over to the Church.

This argument presumed an ecclesiology of the Church, both as the Mystical Body of Christ and as the dispenser of all graces. From this perspective, Mary mediates in and through the Church in a unique way because she is the one mother of the Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church. Godts; P. Rohellec, a speaker at the 1913 Breton Marian Congress; and Benedict

³⁶ AAS 56 (1964): 1015, in Latin, and *The Pope Speaks* 10 (1964-1965): 183 in English.

³⁷ Two-page typescript, “Beatissime Pater,” Mercier IX, 37 (see n. 21).

³⁸ Godts, *De definitibilitate*, 243.

Merkelbach, O.P., a Belgian Commission member, used this concept by quoting St. Augustine: "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."³⁹ Jean Bainvel, S.J., and Mercier specified that Mary's generation of children in the Church began in particular for each Christian at the moment of incorporation into Christ's body by baptism.⁴⁰ The 1915 Belgian petitions, under Mercier's direction, were the first to use the title *Mother of the Church* as part of a specific argument proposing the dogmatic definition of Mary's universal mediation.⁴¹ Because this argument did not identify *the church* as the Catholic Church, and did not specify baptism of water, it implied an ecumenical openness to those who receive baptism of blood or baptism of desire. Since *the church* could include the Catholic Church, the *Mother-of-the-Church* approach even allowed for a harmony of Mary's mediation with sacramental graces.

Elements of the *Mother-of-the-Church* argument later appeared at Vatican II. *Lumen Gentium* used the same quote from St. Augustine and stated the council's intention, "to set forth 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."⁴² Paul VI's proclamation of Mary as *Mother of the Church* also echoed this mediation movement theme with his explanation: "Since Mary is the Mother of Christ, who, as soon

³⁹ Godts, *De definibilibitate*, 17, 40; P Rohellec, "Marie dispensatrice des grâces divines," in *Quatrième Congrès Marial Breton tenu au Folgoat en l'honneur de Marie, Mère de Grâce: 4, 5 et 6 Septembre 1913* (Quimper: Arsène de Kerangal, 1915), 56; and Benedict H. Merkelbach, "Commissio Belgica," 154—all gave this citation from *De Virginitate*, VI (PL vol. XL, col. 399). The English translation is taken from *Lumen Gentium*, no. 53 (in *Vatican Council II . . . Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975], 414).

⁴⁰ Jean Bainvel, "Marie, Mère de Grâce," *Études* 94 (1903): 595; Mercier, "La dévotion," 95.

⁴¹ Belgian clergy, "Beatissime," 1-2.

⁴² *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 53 and 54 (ed. Flannery [1975], 414).

as He took on a human nature in her virginal womb, united to Himself as its Head His Mystical Body, which is the Church. And so Mary, as the Mother of Christ, must be regarded as Mother of all the faithful and the bishops, which means of the Church.”⁴³ Thus, much of the *Mother-of-the-Church* argument was validated at Vatican II.

III. Conclusion: Vatican II's New Logical Argument

This study of Mary's title “Mother of the Church” was made from the perspective of the historical development of the mediation movement. Although this is not intended as a promotion of a dogmatic definition, this paper will conclude with a proposal of how the Marian teaching of Vatican II, both *Lumen Gentium* and Paul VI's proclamation, has now provided a new logical explanation for Mary's universal mediation using this ecclesiological approach.

- 1) “The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men” (LG, no. 8).
- 2) As the mother of the Mystical Body of Christ, Mary is also Mother of the Church (Paul VI).
- 3) Therefore, Mary is the mother of the Church's communication of truth and grace to all men.

Next, the conclusion from the first part is shortened to focus on grace and becomes the first step in the second part:

- 1) Mary is the mother of the Church's communication of grace to all men.
- 2) For this argument, grace is understood to mean spiritual life.
- 3) Just as physical motherhood is a type of mediation whereby a mother mediates physical life from God to a physical child, spiritual motherhood is a type of mediation whereby a mother mediates spiritual life from God to a spiritual child.
- 4) In conclusion, as the mother of the Church's communication of grace to all men, Mary is spiritually the maternal mediatrix of grace to all men.

⁴³ Paul VI, “Exploring the Mystery of the Church: Address of Pope Paul VI at the Close of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council,” *The Pope Speaks* 10 (1964-1965): 139.

It is significant that *Lumen Gentium*'s description of grace is singular (both in nos. 8 and 61), as a general category that could include sacramental, sanctifying, and Old Testament grace. This more general description suggests the common essence of grace as spiritual life and avoids the complexities of the subdivisions of grace viewed under different aspects.

Paul VI based Mary's motherhood of the Church on St. Paul's doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ (Rom. 12:3-5, I Cor. 12:12-27). This mystical body idea can help to explain secondary mediation in general because, if Christ is the one mediator of grace, then everyone who is a member of Christ's body, can also, in Christ, mediate grace.⁴⁴ This approach implies that the more fully a person is integrated into Christ's body, then the more that person would be able to mediate. Since Mary is the only person who was immaculately conceived and remained sinless, she is the human being most completely integrated into the Mystical Body of Christ, and therefore most empowered to mediate grace. Because the mystical body concept is biblical, it could be useful in ecumenical discussions to explain how human beings can mediate grace. In discussions with those who accept Mary's sinlessness, the specific application to her of the Mother-of-the-Mystical-Body concept could explain why Mary's mediation is uniquely universal.

Vatican II offers a great richness and direction to Marian scholars. In these days of interest in Mary's mediation, perhaps Paul VI's declaration and *Lumen Gentium* may provide some insights from Vatican II to guide the future discussions. May Pope John Paul II's image of *Mater Ecclesiae* serve as a fruitful reminder of these truths.

⁴⁴ Melvin Ennis Dodd, Jr. Interview by author. Silver Spring, Maryland. May 13, 2003.