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"TO LIVE THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST WITH MARY" – The Presence and Role of Mary in Liturgy

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Of the new directions for Marian devotion that have emerged from Vatican II, one of the most challenging to the Roman rite will be the theological reflection of Mary's role and presence within the Church, especially in the celebration of liturgy. *Lumen gentium* recommended that "devotion to the Blessed Virgin, especially in the liturgy, be generously fostered" (LG 67).^{*} *Marialis cultus* (1974) spoke of Mary in liturgy as "present and active, the one with whom the Church wishes to celebrate the mystery of Christ" (MC 11).¹ The *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (1986) repeated the Church's desire to live the mystery of Christ not only with Mary but also in imitation of her, and stated that in liturgy the Church "continually finds that the

* Abbreviations used in this paper are the following:

CM, GI – *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, General Introduction.

CM, LI – *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Lectionary Introduction

CM, M – *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Individual Mass formulary

DV – *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)

GS – *Gaudium et spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)

Lect – Introduction to the Lectionary for the Mass (2d ed., 21 January 1981)

LG – *Lumen gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)

MC – *Marialis cultus* (Apostolic Exhortation for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1974)

MD – *Mediator Dei* (Encyclical on the Liturgy, 1947)

OT – *Optatum totius* (Decree on Priestly Formation)

RM – *Redemptoris mater* (Encyclical on the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1987)

SC – *Sacrosanctum concilium* (Constitution on the Liturgy)

¹ "... ut et praesens et operans, quacum Ecclesia una simul Christi mysterium vivere vult..." (MC 11).

Presence and Role of Mary in Liturgy

Blessed Virgin is ever present as the Mother of the Church and its advocate" (CM, GI 12). *Redemptoris mater* studied the place which Mary had in the "mystery of Christ" and her "active and exemplary presence in the life of the Church."² What is common to all these references to Mary's presence and role in liturgy is their association with "mystery," specifically the mystery of Christ in liturgy. Here we wish to explore three aspects or dimensions of the "mystery" celebrated in liturgy: the mystery of Christ, salvation history, the mystery of the Church. We will then outline the Virgin Mary's relation or presence to each of these dimensions. The principal texts will be the documents of Vatican II and the postconciliar period.

LITURGY AS THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

In the Synoptics, one logion containing the word *mysterion* is found in parallel passages (Mk. 4:10-12; Mt. 13:10-13; Lk. 8:9-10): "To you is granted to know the mystery ("mysteries" in Matthew and Luke) of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside everything is in parables." Here, and in some apocalyptic texts, *mysterion* indicates that the kingdom is manifested in Jesus recognized and proclaimed as Christ, but that only a selected few come to know the mystery.

The word has a more specific meaning in the Pauline writings. In 1 Corinthians 2:7, Paul speaks of "a hidden wisdom of God in a mystery, a wisdom which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, which no one of the rulers of this world had known." The word takes on its fuller expression in the Letter to the Colossians where the mystery is identified as "Christ among you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27). In Colossians 2:2-3, Paul speaks of "the mystery of God, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"; and in Colossians 4:3 and Ephesians 3:4, he speaks of "the mystery of Christ." The special characteristic of the mystery in the Letter to the Ephesians is the collective aspect: "the mystery of his will . . . to gather all things in Christ, both heavenly and earthly" (Eph. 1:9-10). The longest single Pauline reference is found in Ephesians 3:2-11: the mystery was unknown in previous generations, and Paul has been entrusted with this special grace of proclaiming to the Gentiles

... the unfathomable treasure of Christ and of throwing light on the inner workings of the mystery kept hidden through all the ages in God, the Creator of everything. The purpose of this was, that now, through the Church, the principalities and ruling

² "...quam Maria habet in mysterio Christi, deque eius in vita Ecclesiae praesentia actiosa et exemplari" (RM 1).

forces should learn how many-sided God's wisdom is, according to the plan which he had formed from all eternity in Christ Jesus our Lord.³

Mysterion indicated the entire plan of God to be made manifest in Christ and destined to be fully revealed at the end of time. It was a comprehensive notion transcending the limitations of time and already at an early period was associated with the liturgy. In the second century, Melito of Sardis could refer to the mystery celebrated at Easter as bringing together the "new and the old, the eternal and the temporal, perishable and imperishable, mortal and immortal."⁴

By the fourth century, the liturgical ceremonies, especially the ceremonies of Baptism and the Eucharist, were described in the Greek-speaking churches as *mysteria*, and in the Latin-speaking churches as either *mysteria* or *sacramenta* (the Latin translation).⁵ Leo the Great's sermon for the Ascension well expresses the relation between Christ and the mystery in liturgy:

Forty days after his resurrection, Our Savior Jesus Christ in the sight of his disciples was taken to heaven and his bodily presence was ended . . . That which was visible in our Redeemer has now passed over into the mysteries; and, to strengthen and perfect our faith, instruction has given way to vision; the hearts of believers, illumined by light from on high, will follow this authority.⁶

However, there were reservations about accepting the term *mysteria* in the West. Some thought the term unacceptable because of its association with Greek and pagan rites of initiation. Tertullian rejected the Latin transposition "*mysterium*" preferring "*sacramentum*," a well-established Latin word rich with Roman military associations. Augustine used *sacramentum* and *mysterium* almost interchangeably, but with slightly different connotations. *Sacramentum* referred primarily to the outward rite or symbol; *mysterium*, to the hidden meaning behind it. Here is the starting point for the foundations of a Latin sacramental theology. Eventually, "mysteries" came to designate the spiritual realities themselves, whereas "sacraments" were those actions by which Christians were initiated into these realities. After the twelfth century, the formulation of the precise definition of the sacraments and the teaching on their efficacy had the unfortunate result of focusing attention much more on the exterior actions, while neglecting the mysteries which underlie the sacraments.⁷

³ Cf. R. E. Brown, "Mystery (in the Bible)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 10:148-151; hereafter *NCE*.

⁴ *Sources Chrétiennes*, 123:60.

⁵ I.-H. Dalmais, "Theology of the Liturgical Celebration," sect. 3 of *The Church at Prayer*, A. G. Martimort *et al.*, eds. (4 vols.; Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 1:253.

⁶ *Sources Chrétiennes*, 74 bis:278-279. Cf. note 2 for discussion of the phrase "*corporalis praesentiae modum fecit*."

⁷ Dalmais, "Theology," in *The Church at Prayer*, 1:257.

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A few, such as Thomas Aquinas and Pierre de Bérulle, continued to understand mystery in a comprehensive sense, but the word lost all association with liturgy. In the middle ages, mysteries referred to the events of the life of Christ, especially his death and resurrection,⁸ presented as objects for meditation (as in the rosary) or proposed as examples of conduct to be imitated. Even the notion of the paschal mystery lost its comprehensive meaning – the saving plan of God centered in Christ – and became an historical commemoration of the events of Christ's life, especially his death and resurrection.⁹

Not until the twentieth century was the Pauline and Eastern patristic notion of "mystery" in liturgy recovered, largely through the efforts of Dom Odo Casel and the school of Maria-Laach. From 1918 to 1941, in more than 100 articles, Casel attempted to clarify, defend and express what he believed was the teaching of the Fathers and the ancient liturgies.

For Casel, "mystery" was at the heart of liturgy. He defined liturgy as "the sacred and cultic action in which a saving work of the past is made present in a specific form; the worshipping community, through this action, participates in the saving work which has been commemorated and in this way attains saving grace."¹⁰ "Mystery" embraced the whole salvific design of God, the "wonderful works" pointing to Christ, and the culmination of this plan when all is restored in Christ. Through the liturgy of the Church, the mystery was rendered present. Casel, repeating the words of Leo the Great, wrote: "Since Christ is not longer visible among us, . . . 'What was visible in the Lord has passed over into the mysteries.' We meet his person, his saving deeds, the workings of his grace in the mysteries of his worship. St. Ambrose writes: 'I find you in your mysteries.'"¹¹

When first presented, Dom Casel's ideas elicited much discussion and no little controversy. Questions arose over his explanation of similarities between Christian and pagan mystery cults and the mode of Christ's presence in the mysteries (*Mysteriengegenwart*) – a topic not found in the Fathers. At the same time, a larger notion of sacramentality – one in harmony with the patristic notion of mystery – was being developed by Anscar Vonier, Edward Schillebeeckx, Karl Rahner and others.

⁸ K. Rahner, "Mysterien des Lebens Jesu," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 7:722.

⁹ This limitation of the paschal mystery to a commemoration of the historical events of Christ's life may explain the recurring difficulty we have in celebrating Sunday when understood as the day to commemorate the resurrection. Dom Gregory Dix remarked that "there is no evidence that it [the paschal character of Sunday] . . . ever made very much appeal to popular piety in any part of christendom" (Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* [London: Black, 1945], 359).

¹⁰ O. Casel, cited by I.-H. Dalmais, "Le 'Mystère': Introduction à la théologie de la liturgie," *La Maison-Dieu* 14 (1948):72, n. 13.

¹¹ Dom Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship, and Other Writings*, ed. B. Neunheuser (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1962), 12; I.-H. Dalmais, "Mystery Theology," in *NCE* 10:165-166.

The individual sacraments were placed in a Christological and ecclesial setting. For example, Schillebeeckx saw the unique and once-for-all character of Christ's act of redemption offered through the sacraments of the Church. Sacraments and sacramental presence were founded on Christ's humanity, assumed by the divine person in the hypostatic union. A consequence of this union was that the acts of the divine person do not suffer the limits of duration. "Liturgical mysteries are truly the celebration and manifestation of the historical redeeming act, even though their actual content is only the *mysterium*, i.e., the permanent element and the instrumental power."¹² Karl Rahner held that the Church is the fundamental sacrament and that through the Church one participates in the mystery of Christ's redemption.¹³ Although clarification of the concept remains to be done, this restoration of mystery as central to liturgy has been called by Joseph Ratzinger one of the most "fruitful theological ideas of our century and has made possible in our century an understanding of liturgy more complete than at any time since the patristic period."¹⁴

Vatican II reestablished "mystery" as the basis for understanding both the Church and liturgy. The Constitution on the Liturgy contains at least twenty-three references to "mystery" celebrated in liturgy – e.g., the mystery of Christ, the mystery of redemption, the mystery of salvation, the paschal mystery. In liturgy, the Church both expresses and manifests to others the "mystery of Christ and the true nature of the Church" (SC 2). God's saving plan and the wonderful deeds of God in the Old Testament culminate in the paschal mystery – the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (SC 5). Baptism is an initiation into the "paschal mystery" (SC 6). The purpose of the liturgical year is to relive the "whole mystery of Christ," from the Incarnation to his final coming (SC 102). Almost borrowing the vocabulary from Dom Casel, the express teaching of *Sacrosanctum concilium* is that through the action of the Church and the divine power the "mysteries of redemption . . . are in some way made present" (SC 102).¹⁵

¹² J. Gaillard, "La théologie des Mystères," *Revue Thomiste* 57 (1957): 541; cited in Dalmais, "Mystery Theology," in *NCE* 10:164-166.

¹³ Cf. Kevin W. Irwin, "Sacrament," in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1987), 919-920.

¹⁴ "Die vielleicht fruchtbarste theologische Idee unseres Jahrhunderts, die Mysterientheologie Odo Casels, gehört dem Bereich der Sakramententheologie zu und man kann wohl ohne Übertreibung sagen, dass seit dem Ende der Väterzeit die Theologie der Sakramente keine solche Blüte erlebt hat, wie sie ihr in diesem Jahrhundert im Zusammenhang mit den Ideen Casels geschenkt wurde, die ihrerseits nur auf dem Hintergrund der liturgischen Bewegung und ihrer Wiederentdeckung des altchristlichen Gottesdienstes zu begreifen sind." Joseph Ratzinger, *Die sakramentale Begründung christlicher Existenz* (Meitingen-Freising: Kyrios-Verlag, 1970), 5.

¹⁵ SC 102: "Mysteria Redemptionis ita recolens, divitias virtutum atque meritorum Domini sui, adeo ut omni tempore quodammodo presentia reddantur, fidelibus aperit, qui ea attingant et gratia salutis repleantur." Louis Bouyer pointed out the similarity between *Sacrosanctum concilium* and

MARY AND THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

In all the conciliar and postconciliar documents, Mary's presence and role in liturgy is always related to the "mystery of Christ" or to his "saving work," and not simply to the historical person of Christ. The first document of the Vatican II, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, spoke of the "inseparable bond" (*nexu indissolubili*) joining Mary to the saving works of Christ (SC 103). The revisions which the title of the conciliar statement on Mary underwent are part of an interesting evolution. Earlier titles had been: "On the Mother of Jesus and the Church" and "Mary, Mother of the Mystical Body." In the third session of the council, "Mary, Mother of the Church" and "Mary, Mother of Believers" were proposed. The final version, found in *Lumen gentium*, reads: "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church."¹⁶

Marialis cultus (1974), Paul VI's apostolic letter on the "right ordering and development of devotion to Mary," begins by affirming the Christocentric orientation of all Marian devotion. All Christian worship "takes its origin and effectiveness from Christ, finds its complete expression in Christ, and leads through Christ in the Spirit to the Father" (*MC* Intro). All forms of Marian devotion gravitate towards this worship [of Christ] as to their natural and necessary point of reference. But it is precisely through the mystery of Christ that the Virgin Mary is found. "The Church's reflection today on the mystery of Christ and on her own nature has led her. . . to the same figure of a woman: the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church" (*MC* Intro). In liturgy, she is "present and active," and "with her the Church desires to live the mystery of Christ" (*MC* 11).

The relation of Mary to the mystery of Christ is explored throughout *Marialis cultus*. The language of bonding or uniting used to describe the relation between Mary and the mystery of Christ is characteristic of this document and of the writings of Paul VI.¹⁷ For example, the reform of the liturgical year made possible "a more organic and closely knit" insertion of the Mother into the "whole mystery" of Christ.

Casel's teaching. "The heart of the teaching on the liturgy in the conciliar Constitution is also the heart of Dom Casel's teaching. The Constitution's constant citation of the patristic, liturgical, and earlier conciliar texts on which Casel based his interpretation, and its interpretation of these texts on the same lines as Casel show a relation of filiation that will strike all future historians" (Bouyer in a review in *La Maison-Dieu* 80 [1964]:242, cited in Dalmais, "Theology," in *The Church at Prayer*, 1:271).

¹⁶ Cf. Salvatore M. Meo, O.S.M., "Il Tema Maria-Chiesa nel recente Magistero Ecclesiastico: Contenuti e Terminologia," in *Maria e la Chiesa oggi* (Roma: Edizioni Marianum, 1985), 44.

¹⁷ Cf. Thomas A. Thompson, S.M., "The Virgin Mary in the Liturgy: 1963-1988," *Marian Studies* 40 (1989): 84-89.

Mary is related to the whole mystery of Christ celebrated in liturgy – to the Trinity, the Holy Spirit and the Church. In Paul VI's solemn profession of faith (30 June 1968), he spoke of the "absolute and inseparable bond uniting Mary to the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption."¹⁸

The opening section of the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (1986) indicates that the liturgy is never a celebration of Mary but of her participation in the mystery of Christ ("The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Celebration of the Mystery of Christ"). The Masses celebrate above all "the events of salvation in which, by God's salvific plan, the Blessed Virgin was involved in view of the mystery of Christ" (*CM*, GI 6).

Redemptoris mater develops Vatican II's affirmation that it is only with the "light of the mystery of the Incarnate Word that humanity is comprehensible" (*GS* 22). The mystery of Christ also makes Mary comprehensible and is the basis for her presence. "In the mystery of Christ is found the full meaning of Mary... The mystery of Christ sheds light upon Mary, and through the presence of the mystery of Christ Mary is also present."¹⁹

THE LITURGY AS SALVATION HISTORY

In addition to identifying liturgy with mystery, Vatican II placed liturgy within the history of salvation. This context was not present in *Mediator Dei* (1947) which had defined liturgy as "the public worship which our Redeemer as head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father" (*MD* 20). The Constitution on the Liturgy defines the worship of the Church with many Scriptural allusions.

God who "wills that all be saved" ... sent his Son ... to preach ... to heal ... to be a "bodily and spiritual medicine." ... The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ ... To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present to his Church..." (*SC* 5, 7)

The council's directive that Sacred Scripture should be given a place of greatest importance within liturgy made salvation history a major dimension of liturgy. The

¹⁸ "Arcto et indissolubili vinculo mysterio Incarnationis et Redemptionis coniuncta..." *Marianum* 32 (1970): 264.

¹⁹ "In solo Christi mysterio 'clarescit' plene eius mysterium.... 'Per mysterium ideo Christi super fidei Ecclesiae scaenam plene Matris eius mysterium splendet' (*RM* 4). 'Per Christi autem mysterium ipsa etiam praesens adest inter homines. Sic per Filii mysterium illuminatur quoque mysterium Matris' (*RM* 19).

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homily should be drawn from scriptural or liturgical sources, and "its character should be that of a proclamation of God's wonderful works in the *history of salvation*, that is, the *mystery of Christ*, which is ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy" (SC 35).²⁰ As the Benedictine liturgist Dom Cyprian Vagaggini wrote:

Christian revelation, especially in the Scripture, is not presented to us *primarily* as a system explanatory of things seen under their entitative aspect, after the manner of a metaphysical explanation of being. . . . Revelation, especially in the Scripture, is presented rather, *first of all*, as a history; as a history always in the making; as a sacred history always in the making.

Thus sacred history, mystery, mystery of Christ, mystery of the Church are indivisible, are even a single reality, so that we could actually speak of a single concept given different shadings by these various expressions.²¹

Although at times, even in our recent past, the Pauline notion of "mystery" may have been considered the revelation of a timeless truth or a doctrine above history, the revelation of the mystery was given in and through persons and events in history. The works accomplished by God in the history of salvation manifest and proclaim both the doctrine and mystery contained therein (DV 2).

The mystery of Christ in sacred history, revealed in successive stages – foretold in the Old Testament, fully revealed in Christ, and made present in the Church – is one mystery. The successive stages belong to a continuum. Salvation history is based on the notion that there is one divine plan of redemption, and that revelation is achieved through both deeds and words which have a certain unity and which ultimately manifest Christ who is the fullness of revelation (DV 2). It is also based on the conviction that there is one author for the Scriptures and that, despite the differences in the books, it is Christ who is foretold, revealed, awaited throughout the Scriptures (LG 55). Through the phases or stages of this history, one saving event is celebrated in promise, in fulfillment, and in anticipation of the final revelation.

MARY IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

Placing Mary within the history of salvation is one of the major emphases of Vatican II's teaching on Mary. ("The Role of the Blessed Virgin in the History of

²⁰ "Haec vero imprimis ex fonte sacrae Scripturae et Liturgiae hauriatur, quasi annuntiatio mirabilium Dei in *historia salutis* seu *mysterio Christi*, quod in nobis praesens semper adest et operatur, praesertim in celebrationibus liturgicis" (SC 35) (italics added).

²¹ Dom Cyprian Vagaggini, O.S.B., *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy: A General Treatise on the Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. L. J. Doyle and W. A. Jurgens, from the 4th Ital. ed. rev. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1976), 4, 18.

Salvation" is the title of a section in Chapter 8 of *Lumen gentium*.) Through her consent at the Annunciation and the divine motherhood, Mary has become part of the mystery of salvation (*LG* 55; *MC* 5). Because of her participation in salvation history, Mary "in some way unites in herself and radiates the most important teachings of the faith" (*LG* 65). Fundamental to discerning her presence in salvation history is the principle that all Scripture points to the mystery of Christ; because of her relation to the mystery of Christ and salvation history, much of Scripture is illuminated and illustrated by Mary.

The stages of sacred history, briefly outlined in the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, are given further development in *Lumen gentium* (55-59), which outlines Mary's participation in that history. It is not so much a literal reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary in an Old Testament text, but rather the way in which an event or character of the Old Testament, when considered in the liturgy of the Church, prefigures or announces some quality of the Virgin Mary. "These primitive documents, as they are read in the Church and are understood under the light of further and full revelation, gradually bring into a clearer light the figure of a woman, the Mother of the Redeemer" (*LG* 55). Considered in this light, she is foreshadowed in the promise given to our first parents, in the maiden who conceives and bears Emmanuel, in the humble and poor who await the Lord, in the Daughter of Sion. She "has entered deeply" into the history of salvation (*LG* 65).

The revisions of the *Lectionary* in the postconciliar period show a growing awareness of the principles underlying Mary's role in the history of salvation. In the *Lectionary* published immediately after the Council, only those readings considered explicitly Marian, "either from the evidence of their content or from the results of careful exegesis" (*MC* 12), were included for Marian celebrations. In this revision, many texts from the Old Testament formerly used at Marian Masses were omitted. However, *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, published in 1986, contains a lectionary of twenty readings from the Old Testament, twenty-nine psalms as responsorials, as well as readings from the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. Although the message of these books may vary greatly, they are read in liturgy with the conviction that the entire Scripture forms "a single corpus that is permeated by the mystery of Christ" (*CM*, LI 3b). The *Collection*, which makes possible a commemoration of the Blessed Virgin throughout the liturgical year, finds its ultimate justification in Mary's "close participation in the history of salvation" (*CM*, GI 6).

In the first stage - in the salvation announced through the patriarchs and prophets - "certain events, figures, or symbols of the Old Testament foretell or suggest in a wonderful manner the life and mission of the Blessed Virgin Mary" (*CM*, GI 39). In the *Lectionary* of the *Collection*, Mary is prefigured in the woman of Genesis,

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Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Anna, Judith, Esther, the mother of the seven Maccabees, the spouse of the Canticle of Canticles, daughter of Sion, the burning bush, the ark of the covenant, the city of God, the temple of Jerusalem.

In the second stage – the salvation fully revealed in Christ – Mary is the one intimately involved in all of those saving deeds of God. Many of the Mass formularies of the *Collection* describe this association: “mother of Christ, our God” (*CM*, M26); “first fruits of the new creation” (*CM*, M20); “mother and companion of the Redeemer” (*CM*, M30); “servant of the mystery of Redemption” (*CM*, M22); “partner in his passion” (*CM*, M12). Because “all the virtues extolled in the Gospel – faith, charity, hope, humility, mercy, purity of heart – flourished in Mary, the first and most perfect of Christ’s disciples” (*CM*, LI 3c), she may illustrate the meaning of New Testament texts, even though they contain no explicit reference to her.

A striking example of a Marian resonance in a New Testament text with no literal reference to Mary is found in *Redemptoris mater* (no. 7). In the opening verse of the Letter to the Ephesians – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3) – the blessing refers in a special and exceptional way to Mary, greeted by Elizabeth as “blessed among women.” The divine plan is eternally linked with Christ, with a special place reserved for the “woman” who is the Mother of him to whom the Father has entrusted the work of salvation. It is through the specific event of salvation history – the Annunciation – that Mary is brought into the mystery of Christ (*RM* 7, 8).

LITURGY AND THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

The mystery of the Church, according to Dom Odo Casel, is the “mystery of Christ present among us.” By its relation to Christ, the Church is a “kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all people” (*LG* 1) and “the universal sacrament of salvation” (*GS* 45). The liturgical celebration is the principal manifestation of the Church’s nature, the “summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, and, at the same time, the fountain from which all her power flows” (*SC* 7, 10). There is an identity between the mystery of Christ, salvation history, the mystery of the Church – all of which are celebrated in liturgy. For Dom Vagaggini, “liturgy cannot be understood unless it is seen against the background of sacred history, mystery, the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the Church. Not without reason does the Second Vatican Council explain the nature of the liturgy in just this perspective.”²²

²² *Ibid.*

The mystery of the Church is not an abstract truth, but a part of the mystery of Christ within sacred history. The third stage of salvation history – the “time of the Church” – is the time of fulfillment, the time of the Holy Spirit, the time of awaiting Christ’s return. As “promise” is the characteristic of the Old Testament, the concept of fulfillment or fullness is one of the key concepts of the New Testament. The “time is fulfilled” (Mk. 1:15; Gal. 4:4); “today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your midst” (Lk. 4:20). The sense of completion is based on two characteristics of time in the New Testament: 1) time is a series of events in a continuous and dynamic way culminating in Christ and his return (*oikonomia*), and 2) what occurs at a particular moment, although it happens once, is present for all time (*ephápax*).²³ In liturgy this conception of time means that the past and that which is yet to come is made present in the today of the Church’s existence. In celebrating the sacred mysteries, the Church “celebrates the entire, integral work of salvation. By celebrating things past the Church in a certain sense brings about their presence... in the ‘mystical today’” of the Church (CM, GI 5).

The “today” of salvation history, or the “mystical today” of the Church’s existence (here “mystical” is derived from the same root as *mysterion*),²⁴ has always had a place within the liturgy of the Western rite. St. Leo the Great’s sermons, especially those of Christmas and the Ascension, emphasize that the event celebrated is happening *today*, e.g., “Our Savior was born today (*hodie*): let us rejoice.” For Leo, the limitations of time have been overcome. The events occurred in the past, but through the liturgical celebration, they are brought to the present. In a sense, the past acts upon the present.²⁵ This patristic notion of the “today” of the liturgy recurs in the writings of Dom Odo Casel. “With God,” he wrote,

... there is only one divine “today” different from the today of humans. When we say “now,” the “now” passes immediately... But, with God, there is a “today” which does not pass, which indicates presence without end, a present which remains unchangeable... God gives us the possibility of entering even now into that unchangeable present and the eternal “today.” It is made present in liturgy.²⁶

The Roman rite’s predilection for this term is evident both in ancient (Ambrosian and Hispanic) forms and modern forms (and also in the attention which that rite gives to the word *hodie* in its musical compositions).²⁷ In the present liturgy of the Roman rite, there are many examples of salvation history’s “today” – from the

²³ Th.-G. Chifflet, “Le Christ et son Temps,” *La Maison-Dieu* 13 (1948):30.

²⁴ Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions*, 607.

²⁵ *Sources Chrétiennes*, 22bis:66.

²⁶ O. Casel, “Hodie,” *La Maison-Dieu* 65 (1961):127.

²⁷ Cf. Jordi Pinell, O.S.B., “L’*Hodie* festivo negli Antifonari Latini,” *Rivista Liturgica* 61 (1974):579-592.

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antiphon of the Invitatory at Morning Prayer and the Solemn Blessings for Christmas, the Ascension, and Pentecost, to the antiphon at Evening Prayer II for Mary's Canticle on the solemnities of Christmas, Epiphany, the Presentation of the Lord, and the Ascension. During the Easter season, the recurrence of "This day" (*Haec dies*) points to the same theme.

A second characteristic of the "time of the Church" is that it is the time of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit present in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ is present and active in every Eucharist (SC 6). In comparison with the Eastern liturgies, the role of the Holy Spirit has been relatively neglected in the Roman liturgy, but a significant advance in outlining the Spirit's role is contained in the Introduction for the *Lectionary* (1981). It is the Holy Spirit who "gathers" the liturgical assembly (*Lect 7*), the Holy Spirit who works inwardly on each participant so that the word of God comes to each person individually for the good of the whole assembly of the faithful. "The working of the Holy Spirit precedes, accompanies, and brings to completion the whole celebration of the liturgy" (*Lect 9*). It is through the Holy Spirit that the liturgical celebration itself is a "new event" where the proclaimed word is enriched "with new meaning and power" (*Lect 3*).

MARY IN THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

The relation between Mary and the Church, though well established in the patristic period, ceded, especially in the late middle ages and post-reformation period, to a theology of the privileges and, in the late-nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, to a Christotypical approach which neglected Mary's association with the Church. The recovery of Mary's role within the Church is one of the contributions of the twentieth century. It was a theme studied by the French Mariological Society from 1951 to 1953, and the topic of the 1958 International Mariological Congress. In the words of Msgr. Gérard Philips:

It is not an exaggeration to say that the parallelism between Mary and the Church constitutes in contemporary theology a new "rediscovery." I did not say that it is a new theme, because it is solidly established since antiquity in the history of Christianity. But the theme has only been noticed in the renewal with the study of sources. Without its venerable and well-established origin, one could never explain the rapid extension of this idea.²⁸

²⁸ Gérard Philips, *L'Église et son mystère au II^e Concile du Vatican*, vol. 2 (Paris: Desclée, 1968), 269.

Vatican II proposed different images to describe the relation between Mary and the Church. Mary is "the type of the Church . . . exemplar of both virginity and motherhood" (LG 63). From an eschatological perspective, Mary is "the faultless image of the Church, that which she herself desires and hopes to be" (SC 103). Within the Church, "the motherhood of Mary in the order of grace . . . continues uninterruptedly until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect" (LG 62).

For the members of the Church, Mary is present as a "model" (*exemplar*) of virtues (LG 65). Paul VI's *Marialis cultus* (1974) developed the notion of Mary's exemplarity as found in liturgy: Mary is the "model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries" (MC 16). Paul VI developed Mary's exemplarity in liturgy under four titles: *virgo audiens*, *virgo orans*, *virgo pariens*, *virgo offerens*. (In subsequent documents, an explicit relation is made between *virgo audiens* and *ecclesia audiens*. The *Lectionary* [1981] spoke of the *ecclesia audiens*: "In the hearing of God's word the Church is built up and grows . . ." [Lect 7], and the *Collection* proposed Mary as "model of the Church listening to the Word of God" [CM, LI sec. 2].)

Mary's exemplarity does not mean exterior imitation. What is proposed for imitation are not Mary's actions but her attitudes, especially her faith, which make her a model of Christian worship. Mary precedes the Church by becoming or modeling what all the members of the Church must become. (A true icon or model initiates an operation which influences and attracts others.) *Marialis cultus* spoke of the Church's desire to "live the mystery of Christ with Mary" and of "Mary's active presence" (*praesens et operans*) to the Church (MC 11). The *Collection* develops the phrase; not only does the Church wish to live the mystery of Christ with Mary, it also wishes to do it as she did: "to live the mystery of Christ' with her and like her" (CM, GI 12).

In proposing Mary as exemplar, the Church identifies with Mary. Together both listen with faith and welcome with love God's word. Both share in the paschal mystery and implore the gifts of the Spirit. Mary's presence in liturgy has one purpose: an interior transformation into Christ and a deeper identification with the Church. Participation in liturgy with and like Mary can be "the most excellent homage of devotion" offered her (CM, LI 10). The Church is confident of Mary's intercessory presence. As, after the Ascension, "Christ is present . . . as the Head of the Mystical Body . . . as the teacher who continues to proclaim the message of his Gospel . . . as the priest . . . as the Mediator . . . [and] as firstborn brother . . ." (CM, GI 11), so, similarly, after her Assumption, the Blessed Virgin continues her maternal intercession, and she is present to the Church as mother and advocate (CM, GI 12).

PRESENCE OF MARY

This essay has attempted to give some foundation for speaking about Mary's presence in liturgy – a topic about which theological reflection is only at the starting point.²⁹ The word “mystery” has many meanings – something not fully comprehensible, something inspiring awe, and so forth. Here it has been used in the Pauline and patristic notion, revived by Dom Odo Casel, and adopted by Vatican II. Through her association in the divine plan, Mary's presence is related to the “mystery of Christ” to which she is “indissolubly united,” to the history of salvation in which she was deeply involved, and to the mystery of the Church “in which she holds a place that is the highest after Christ and the closest to us” (LG 54).

Explaining Mary's presence in liturgy is not unlike giving the foundations for Christ's presence in the Scripture, in the liturgy, in the assembly. For many centuries, the sacramental presence was spoken about with great clarity (*praesens sacramentaliter*, Denzinger-Schönmetzer 874), but Christ's presence in Scripture and preaching – although well established in the biblical and patristic tradition – received little attention in Catholic theology and has only recently entered into ecclesial documents and consciousness.³⁰

Mary's presence in the history of salvation is completely dependent on the mystery of Christ present in Scripture. “Christ himself is the center and fullness of all of Scripture, as he is of the entire liturgy” (*Lect* 5). All of Scripture is in some way related to Christ – by way of announcement, fulfillment, or expectation of his return. In a similar way, the Virgin Mary illumines or exemplifies the meaning of many texts. Mary's presence in salvation history and in liturgy is always discreet, mediated and illuminated through the mystery of Christ, and her presence is one of wonder, praise, faith, prayer – as befits the disciple of Christ. This presence is not based on literal or historical interpretation, but rather on the typological and spiritual interpretation of the Scripture and on her exemplarity of all the virtues and qualities of a follower of Christ.

²⁹ J. Castellano, “Vergine Maria,” in *Nuovo Dizionario di Liturgia* (Milan: Edizioni paoline, 1988), 1554.

³⁰ Until Vatican II, we had relatively little experience with announcing and celebrating Christ's presence in the Word proclaimed in the assembly. Even at the Council, some had reservations about announcing that Christ is present also in the explanation of the Scriptures. The original text of Article 35 was “Christ is present when the Scriptures are read and interpreted in the Church.” In the final version, however, because of reservations on this point, the notion of Christ's presence in the interpretation was excluded. Cf. Cor Traets, S.J., “La Liturgie rencontre de Dieu dans le Christ,” *Questions Liturgiques* (1986/1):234.

Significant for contemporary Marian devotion is the association with the "time of the Church" or the "today" of salvation history. The Virgin Mary's presence is not limited to past events in the life of the Church. Mary has a special relation to the Holy Spirit, and through the Spirit every "liturgical celebration, based primarily on the word of God . . . becomes a new event and enriches the word itself with new meaning and power" (*Lect* 3). In liturgy, the Church follows the example of Mary as "she listens, accepts, proclaims and venerates the word of God, distributes it to the faithful as the bread of life and in the light of that word examines the signs of the times and interprets and lives the events of history" (*MC* 17; *CM*, LI 9).

Vatican II not only restored the notion of mystery to liturgy, but also spoke of living the mystery (e.g., living the paschal mystery [*OT* 8]). *Marialis cultus* and the *Collection* present Mary as the model of living the mystery of Christ and express the Church's desire to live the mystery of Christ with and in imitation of Mary. Living the mystery of Christ with and as Mary in the Church's *today* is part of the life of faith or of that authentic Marian spirituality in which all are invited to participate (*RM* 48). Mary's presence in liturgy is totally dependent on the mystery of Christ, to which she is indissolubly joined. "The Virgin Mother is constantly present on this journey of faith of the People of God toward the light" (*RM* 35).