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THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE MARY-CHURCH ANALOGY ¹

If it be legitimate, and surely it is, to urge that Catholic devotion to the Blessed Virgin, not only must honor her as the most excellent of God's creatures, but must further rise above confidence that "never was it known that anyone who fled to [her] protection, implored [her] help, or sought [her] intercession, was left unaided," it is equally legitimate to ask if this devotion does not have an even more profound significance for Christian living. And if the answer be, as it so often is, that the solidity of our devotion to Mary is most soundly shown in sincere imitation of her virtues, let no one be surprised to hear it urged that Mary is, in all that most distinguishes her extraordinary holiness, quite literally inimitable.

Her divine Motherhood itself, the center and the heart of her unique position before God and men, sets her forever apart from all others of mankind and beyond all hope of following. The immaculate conception that marked the first instant of her existence as one of supernatural union with God, this too

¹ This paper recounts in very brief compass the more important theological conclusions as they appear in the mid-twentieth century regarding the parallelism between Mary and the Church. No attempt is made to examine the sources of this comparison in Scripture or in the patristic or scholastic traditions. Other papers in this volume touch on some of these source problems. Basic works on the whole subject include: H. M. Köster, *Die Magd des Herrn*, 2nd ed. (Limburg an der Lahn, 1954); id., *Unus Mediator. Gedanken zur marianischen Frage* (Limburg an der Lahn, 1950); O. Semmelroth, S.J., *Urbild der Kirche. Organischer Aufbau des Mariengeheimnisses*, 2nd ed. (Würzburg, 1954); A. Müller, *Ecclesia-Maria. Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche* (Fribourg, 1951); Y. M. J. Congar, O.P., *Le Christ, Marie et l'Eglise* (Bruges, 1952); H. Coathalem, S.J., *Le parallélisme entre la Sainte Vierge et l'Eglise* (Rome, 1954); C. Vollert, S.J., *Mary and the Church*, in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M., 2 (Milwaukee, 1957) 550-595. Cf. also D. Fernández, C.M.F., *María y la Iglesia en la moderna bibliografía alemana*, in *EM* 18 (1957) 55-107; Crisóstomo de Pamplona, O.F.M.Cap., *María y la Iglesia en la moderna bibliografía francesa*, *ibid.*, 109-125. Unfortunately, the last two articles mentioned were not available to us while writing the present paper.

remains forever beyond the imitation of the most generous follower of Christ. Her uniquely virginal maternity raised her to a plane toward which Christian hope itself may not aspire. And is it not the very meaning of Mary's association with her Son's redemptive work, that this association was inimitable in depth and scope and fruitfulness? Even her glorious bodily Assumption, pledge of Christian hope though it be, will find its imitators only on the day of the consummation of this world of space and time.

And yet that Mary is imitable and to be imitated by all her children surely remains a basic Christian insight.² How this may be so, is one facet at least of the fruitfulness of the study so eagerly pursued in recent years of the strange and in many ways startling parallelism drawn from Christian antiquity itself between Mary, the Mother of God, and the Church of Christ.³ It is the purpose of this paper to study briefly the terms of that analogy, its basic justification, and its concrete meaning.

I

THE TERMS OF THE ANALOGY

No intelligible summary of the present position of Catholic theology in regard to this ancient analogy between our Lady and the Church of Christ can proceed without some clarification.

² Some basic considerations concerning the imitation of Mary and Christ may be found in L. Lercher, S.J., *Institutiones Theologiae Dogmaticae*, 3 (Barcelona, 1945) 358-359; cf. 227-230. Also in J. B. Terrien, S.J., *La Mère de Dieu et la Mère des hommes*, part 2, vol. 2, 5th ed. (Paris, 1902).

³ "The inquiry into the relations between Mary and the Church has become one of the dominant concerns of current Mariology. . . . [The parallel] is not a secondary theme that is situated merely on the periphery of Catholic teaching; it is necessary for comprehending the redemptive Incarnation. Although the comparison was a minor object of patristic and scholastic thought, it is a part of the reserves of Christian wealth, and we of today are beholding its entrance into theology." Vollert, *art. cit.*, 552. The reader will find in Father Vollert's article a fuller development of many of the points touched on in this paper.

tion of terms. If there are provocative similarities between Mary and the Church, if the Mother of Christ is indeed the type⁴ of the Church of Christ, we ask first of all: who is this Mary, and what is this Church? The Church of Christ: is this that social organism founded by Christ, which together with Christ as its Head is the whole, mystical Christ living, acting in the world today? Is it that social organism in its function of dynamic prolongation of the redemptive Incarnation, in its active administration, through Eucharistic sacrifice and sacramental sign, of the word once given, of the faith and grace once won for men? in its exercise of power to teach, to govern, to sanctify in the name and with the authority of Christ? We note at once: Mary is not the type or exemplar of the Church of Christ in this, its active, hierarchical function. The Church as hierarchically active is the continuation in the world of Christ's redemptive activity; this is the Church in its most divine aspect.

Mary can be the prototype and even, as it were, the personification of the Church only under its other aspect. For the Church is also the Body of Christ conceived apart from Christ its Head, conceived indeed apart from that element within the Church which carries out the active teaching and sanctification of the multitude of Christ's faithful. This is the Church conceived as the collectivity of those who are beneficiaries of the Lord's salvific love. This is the Church in its most human aspect.⁵ This is the Church as dynamically *receptive* of the fruits of Christ's redemption through the efficacious ministry of the Church as hierarchically constituted. Only for the Church thus conceived is Mary here considered as the prototype, the ideal, the personification of all that is, or all that

⁴ For an analysis of "type" as used here, see Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., *Theotokos: The Mother of God*, in *The Mystery of the Woman*, ed. E. D. O'Connor, C.S.C. (Notre Dame University Press, 1956) 14-16.

⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 4, a. 3, and Vollert, *art cit.*, 552-554.

should be, mirrored in the group gathered together in the name of Christ, and living by the life of the Spirit of Christ.

"In short," says René Laurentin, "the Church, which is essentially Jesus Christ spread abroad and communicated, implies two modes of participating in Jesus Christ. It acts *in His name*, and lives with His life. It brings down the divine gifts from heaven and receives them. It exteriorizes God's action by performing sacramental rites, and it interiorizes it by faith. It administers the means of grace and causes them to bear fruit. Its first aspect is that of being official representative of Christ: it is summed up in Peter and his successors. Its second aspect is mystical communion with Christ: this is summed up in Mary. So we are led to make the following distinction: in so far as the Church is an external society, earthly and hierarchical, with the office of visibly taking the place of Jesus Christ between His two comings, the idea of it develops apart from Mariology; but in so far as it is an inward society, heavenly and spiritual, with the office of holding invisible union with Christ, it has its perfect realization in Mary."⁶

All sound and productive analogy, then, between our Lady and the Church will be a portrait of resemblances, and contrasts, between the Virgin Mother of God and the Church understood as the members of Christ's Mystical Body and the submissive Spouse of Christ. And if it be protested that Mary herself is but one of many in this ensemble of Christ's members, the protest will serve at least to emphasize that our analogy is one drawn between the most perfect of the members of Christ's Body and all the rest, whose perfection can at best but feebly reflect what shines forth perfectly in Mary alone. She is what all should be, but never can become, short of the consummation of all, when Christian eschatology itself will see fulfillment.⁷

⁶ René Laurentin, *Queen of Heaven* (Dublin, 1956) 131.

⁷ Cf. Hugo Rahner, S.J., *Marie et l'Eglise* (Paris, 1955) 15-26.

II

THE BASIC JUSTIFICATION OF THE ANALOGY

But Mary is much more than the most perfect member of Christ's Mystical Body. Were she only this, the parallelism between her and the Church would lose much of its deep meaning for our theology. There is a true sense in which our Lady not only antedates the Church in time and significance, but in which she truly *transcends* the Church.⁸ In Mary the Church is, we may say, epitomized, surely at the foot of the cross on Calvary, but even more pointedly in the eager receptiveness of the Majd of Nazareth on the day of the Annunciation. As long as Mary is present, though none other be united with Christ, Christ was never without His Church. Before that Church ever existed, as social organism or Mystical Body, it existed in the living personality of the human Mother of Christ.

And this not merely in the sense that Mary prefigured the Church by some sort of metaphor, not merely in the sense that she enjoyed a priority in time vis-à-vis the Church that was yet to come, but in a sense at once more profound and more meaningful. For Mary rises transcendent above the Church primarily because of the unique ties that join her to her divine Son. This is not only because Mary is one among many members of the Mystical Body, eminent among all others by reason of a privileged share in the common union of all with the Head of the Body. Mary transcends the Church precisely because, above and beyond the common bond of faith and charity between members and the Head, she alone among all is united to Christ in a way exclusively her own. She is the Mother of the Head. This is a bond between Mary and Christ that of its very nature transforms her temporal priority over the Church into a priority of privilege that implies a causal rela-

⁸ Cf. Vollert, *art. cit.*, 554 ff.

tion between her union with Christ and that of all other members of the Mystical Body with the Savior. Where the essence of the Church's supernaturality lies in the life of grace imparted to the members, the heart of Mary's supernatural status resides in the unique prerogative of her divine Motherhood. The grace that filled her soul finds its source not in the mediatory activity of the Church, not in any participation of hers in the Church, but solely in the divine choice that elected her to be the Mother of God become Man. This is the privilege that raised her to the Hypostatic order. Where the Church is the concretized order of grace, Mary so far transcends this order as to partake uniquely in the transcendent order of the Incarnation itself.⁹

True, the Church is not without its relation to the Hypostatic order. This is the order of the Incarnate Word; and it is of His grace and truth the Church receives; by this she lives; by this the sum-total of her dynamism centers always on return to Christ, her source and origin. The Church is dependent, as is Mary, on Christ.

But in the case of Mary, the basic concretizing factor that rules her supernatural dynamism and concentrates it so uniquely in Christ is her divine Motherhood. A privilege exclusively hers, in its very essence bespeaking the Incarnational order, this divine Maternity connotes Mary's priority and transcendence, even in the divine decrees of predestination, over the institution of the Church as the embodiment of the order of redemptive grace. Mary is what she is independently of the Church, as the Hypostatic order is what it is quite apart from the order of salvific grace. Mary then stands apart. Her transcendence over all other followers of Christ, based on this consideration alone, more than justifies the comparison between Mary on the one hand, and the rest

⁹ Cf. M. J. Nicolas, O.P., *Marie et l'église dans le plan divin*, in *BSFEM* 11 (1954) 164-166.

of the Church on the other. This is the fundamental justification of the analogy drawn between the unique human person who is Mary and the moral and mystical personality which is the Church.¹⁰

Two further considerations: Mary is set apart by the unique nature of her redemption, as well as by her unique endowment with grace. The grace that completely supernaturalized Mary's motherhood was the fruit of the foreseen merits of her Son; and if this grace was hers from the first moment of her existence, she was free from original sin from that instant; she knew no need to be freed from it. As she stands alone by reason of her divine Maternity, so she stands alone by reason of the manner of her redemption.

And if she stands apart from all others because of the way she was redeemed, she does so equally by reason of her plenitude of grace. The fullness of grace that marks our Lady surpasses the total of grace granted to all the elect. Her grace is the summary and recapitulation of all grace given to all God's creatures. All, therefore, that marks the essential supernatural reality of the Church, all that the Church owes to Christ, its Head, found an even fuller antecedent realization in the grace given to Mary.

And this grace was Mary's precisely in function of her divine Motherhood. This was the reason, and the rule, and the measure of her endowment. Divine Motherhood, therefore, preventive redemption in view of this motherhood, and finally, fullness of supernatural grace in direct proportion to the dignity of this motherhood—these are the constituent elements of a unique intrinsic relationship with the Incarnate Word which is the doctrinal foundation for the assertion that Mary stands in a true sense, in the supernatural order, apart from the other members of the Mystical Body of Christ; that because of the unique ties that bind her supernaturally to her

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

Son, she necessarily emerges as the exemplar, the prototype and the concrete embodiment of the ideal, ever elusive, but ever to be pursued by the army of the followers of Christ, which is the Church.¹¹

III

THE MEANING OF THE ANALOGY

Catholic theology in our day has opened the way to a new penetration into the mystery of Mary and the mystery of the Church in the economy of salvation by a determined study of the resemblances and differences between these two supernatural realities in their analogous relations to the Incarnate Word of God. By way of illustration, allow me to propose, at least in broad outline, some of the more arresting and fruitful comparisons that have thus been made.

Mother and Spouse

Mary, in her singular divine Maternity, was the representative of all mankind. From her the Son of God took truly human flesh; with her willing co-operation He assumed a body of the seed of Adam. Mary was, in her maternal functions, mankind at the apex of its fruitfulness; hers was the seed promised from the beginning, in whose victory all hope of man's salvation lay. Her consent, then, to become the Mother of God was given, as St. Thomas says, *loco totius generis humani*.¹² Indeed, as St. Thomas also remarks in the same place, the Annunciation story makes it clear that the Incarnation was a kind of spiritual wedding of human nature to the Son of God. And the marital consent given was Mary's

¹¹ Cf. Vollert, *art. cit.*, 554-558; G. Van Ackeren, S.J., *Mary's Divine Motherhood*, in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M., 2 (Milwaukee, 1957) 225-227.

¹² *Sum. Theol.* 3, 30, 1.

fiat, for the individual human nature that was to be joined to the divine Word, could not consent, indeed did not exist, until Mary had first spoken. But she spoke not alone for that human nature which in its individuality was to be wedded to the Word, but in broader view her consent was the consent of all humankind mystically united to Christ's humanity. For the Church that was to come lived in germ in that human nature of Christ. And so Mary not only represented the Church as the Spouse of Christ, she was its very personification. Her *fiat* was the Church's *fiat* as well. Here in all truth the new Eve, in Mary's person, functions also as the new Eve which is the Church of Christ. In Mary, before the Church formally was, the Church as bride of Christ lived and moved and had its being in oneness with its Head.

So does our Lady's divine Motherhood blend almost imperceptibly into that maternal brideship that was a basic insight of Mathias Scheeben.¹³ Mother of Christ as individual Man, she is also Mother of Christ, the mystical collectivity of the faithful which she, together with her Son, conceived and brought forth in God's time. Bride of Christ, as well as Mother, she was intimately conjoined to Him in mind and will and flesh. She stands forever, then, as the model and exemplar of the Mystical Christ, as the new Eve who is, as the Church also proclaims herself to be, *Sponsa Christi*. The essential characteristics of the bride, which found their realization in all too fleshly a manner in the first Eve, are embodied in all their fullness and purity in the Church as the mystical bride of Christ, and in an even more splendid purity, raised if you will, to the *n*th power, as a perfecting element of Mary's divine Maternity.

On the one hand, then, Mary, Mother and also Spouse of Christ, whom she conceived and gave to the world; on the other hand, the Church, spouse of the same Incarnate Word,

¹³ M. Scheeben, *Mariology*, 1 (St. Louis, 1947) 154-183.

and mother of the Mystical Christ, whom she conceives in grace and in whom she engenders that inner life of Christ's Spirit by which alone it lives. But always Mary is the ideal, the personification of all the attributes and qualities that Christ willed to be found in their own way and degree in His Church, mothered by the same Mary to whom He owes His manhood, whose maternal function as regards the faithful must so closely image Mary's own motherly office toward Christ. Thus in briefest outline one may hint at the profound fruitfulness Catholic theology discovers in the analogy between Mary, Mother and Spouse of Christ, and the Church, in its own way spouse of Christ and mother of His mystical Body.¹⁴

Virgin

If Mary's divine Motherhood throws new light on the Church as spouse of her Son and mother of the mystical Christ, the miracle of the Church's virginity-in-motherhood illuminates in its turn the nature of our Lady's maternal virginity.¹⁵ The Church is the mother of the faithful; but she is one with the bridegroom Christ in the spirit rather than in the flesh. The union between Christ and His Church, real and existential though it be, belongs in very essence to the spiritual order. And Christian thought gathers from this truth an understanding of a deeper reality underlying the Church's virginal motherhood. The Church is virginal above all because

¹⁴ J. Lécuyer, C.S.Sp., *Marie et l'Église comme Mère et Épouse du Christ*, in *BSFEM* 10 (1952) 23-41; Clément Dillenschneider, C.S.S.R., *Le mystère de la Corédemption mariale* (Paris, 1951) 147-159. See also M. M. Philippon, O.P., *Maternité spirituelle de Marie et de l'Église*, in *BSFEM* 10 (1952) 63-86, and Nicolas, *Marie et l'Église dans le plan divine*, in *BSFEM* 11 (1953) 165-166; Wenceslaus Sebastian, O.F.M., *Mary's Spiritual Maternity*, in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M., 2 (Milwaukee, 1957) 325-376.

¹⁵ A. -M. Henry, O.P., *Virginité de l'Église, Virginité de Marie*, in *BSFEM* 11 (1953) 29-49.

she has as spouse never betrayed the bridegroom's trust by the adultery that is apostasy or heresy, which would be the ultimate betrayal of her mystical union with the Word. For Christ's Church fidelity to her nuptial vows means precisely constancy to the faith by which she lives. And fidelity to this faith is in its turn the fruit of her constant oneness with Christ. The virginity of the Church is one with the purity with which she has maintained her union in love with Christ, and in the faith this union both generates and preserves. In this virginal purity of faith, born of love, she brings forth sons and daughters unto God, and with maternal solicitude guards and guides them, as Mary guarded and guided the Son of God whom she brought forth.

At once virgin and mother, the Church thus leads us to a new appreciation of the virginity that was part and parcel of Mary's divine Motherhood. For whatever be the insistence of Christian teaching on the bodily virginity of God's Mother, her virginal purity will always lie primarily in the realm of the spirit.¹⁶ Preserved as she ever was from all carnal contact with man, Mary's essential virginity is ultimately to be understood only in the light of her spiritual and mystical union with God. The total dedication of oneself and all one's powers and potentialities of body and soul to the service of the Most High is in its essence a spiritual juncture with God. This is the field of the mind and the will. This is the phase of virginity that gives not only reality but meaning to virginity of body. And this is the factor in Mary's perpetual virginity that, by its pre-eminence, makes her Virgin of virgins, just

¹⁶ Philip J. Donnelly, S.J., *The Perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God*, in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M., 2 (Milwaukee, 1957) 228-296; Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., *Fundamentals of Mariology* (New York, 1956) 142-158, esp. 156-158; Nicolas, *Essai de synthèse mariale*, in *Maria*, ed. H. du Manoir, 1 (Paris, 1949) 720-730; Francis Suárez, S.J., *The Dignity and Virginity of the Mother of God* (West Baden Springs, 1954) 87-116.

as this spiritual dedication is the factor that makes real the virginal purity of the Church as spouse of Christ and mother of the children of God.¹⁷

Holy, Full of Grace

The plenitude of grace that was the secret of Mary's holiness grew from fullness to fullness as by its active presence her grace increased her soul's receptive capacity for further grace. And this fullness of grace in Mary, beyond its meaning as the source of her personal holiness, was the perfect realization, by anticipation, of God's desires and plans for the sanctity of His Church.¹⁸ The holiness that means oneness with God was, in Mary's personal life, proportioned by God to the dignity and responsibilities of her essential role as Mother of God-made-man. And just so the holiness of the Church, the union with God of the faithful as members of Christ's Mystical Body, is proportioned to the function of the Church as spouse of Christ and mother of the faithful. Here again, then, Mary appears as the exemplar and the ideal toward which the Church is ever to strive.

First of all, as Mary's grace, though always present in true fullness, nonetheless through her generous receptiveness

¹⁷ Vollert, *art. cit.*, 575-577.

¹⁸ The analogy here is confined to the plane of personal sanctity as contrasted with the "charismatic" gifts. As we have noted above, the Catholic theologian makes the comparison between Mary and the other members of the Mystical Body in their role as recipients of God's favors. The comparison is not developed as between Mary and the hierarchy in its function as active teacher, guide and source of sanctification. One may ask, however, if there is not room for an extended parallel between Mary's primary privilege as Mother of the Head of the Mystical Body, and the Church in its hierarchical aspect. In more ways than one the divine Maternity may well be thought of as involving by a kind of preeminence all that has been entrusted to the governing and teaching hierarchy of the Church. On this whole subject see M. J. Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity* (St. Louis, 1946) 545-557; *Mariology*, 1 (St. Louis, 1946) 180-183; M. M. Philippon, O.P., *Maternité Spirituelle de Marie et de l'Eglise*, in *BSFEM* 10 (1952) esp. 80-83.

knew constant growth, so the grace of God in the Church, by its Founder's plan, is itself to know unceasing increase in the lives of its members. The duration of earth and time has no profounder meaning than this, that all drives toward the consummation of the sanctity of Christ's spouse, His Church.

We spoke of the faith preserved in virginal purity both by Mary and by the Church. On this faith, as on its indispensable base, is built the whole supernatural structure of the holiness that marks both Christ's Church and Christ's Mother. In the case of each this faith itself was, in God's design, destined to a growth of its own as the deepening foundation of increasing holiness. In Mary there was room for increase of faith by clarification, by explicitation, by purification, till that day when the veil of faith was parted to open on the vision of the Son whom she had conceived in faith before she conceived Him in body, and her divine Motherhood at last knew its perfect fulfillment in indissoluble supernatural union with the Child of her faith and of her womb. Here also Mary is at once the exemplar and the inspiration of the Church. For the faith of the Church was destined, through the ages, to grow after Mary's example by clarification, by explicitation, by purification until it, too, in the case of all who are actively receptive to God's initiative, gives way to the vision of God in which all faith is justified and made perfect in intuitive knowledge.¹⁹

But here, perhaps more than on any other point of the analogy we are studying, it is possible for the Church to fall below the ideal embodied in our Lady. For there is this great difference between the faith and sanctity of the Blessed Virgin and the faith and sanctity of the generality of Christ's other members: Mary's faith and holiness were implanted

¹⁹ For an excellent study of the analogy between Mary's sanctity and that of the Church, see René Laurentin, *Sainteté de Marie et de l'Église*, in *BSFEM* 11 (1953) 2-24. On pages 25-27 will be found a valuable bibliography of monographs on the nature of sanctity.

by God in a soul in which no sin, original or personal, had ever found a foothold; in which, therefore, concupiscence had never risen to weaken or impede union with God. The sanctity of the Church, of the followers of Christ other than the Virgin, is a holiness that must grow in the far less fertile soil of souls bought back from captivity to sin, of souls therefore in which the weeds of sin's penalties have taken tenacious root. Small wonder that there is always the founded fear that in this instance the ideal of personal holiness enshrined in Mary's earthly life will not come to the same full flowering in a Church made up of sinful men.²⁰ Perfectly holy in the powers and instruments of sanctification it wields in the name of Christ its Head, the Church will see the effective holiness of its members, in the nature of things, fall short of Mary's perfection in the reluctant souls of weak and willful men.²¹

Coredemptrix

Thus far our parallelism between Mary and the Church has been examined in the light of the more striking of Mary's personal endowments. But Mary was more than the holy Virgin-Mother of the Word Incarnate. She was called by God to take an even more intimate part in the redemptive mission of her Son.²² And in this her role as Coredemptrix in close subordinate union with Christ, she also serves as prototype and model of the Church of her Child. For the

²⁰ Some insights into the sin and the sinner in the Church will be found in Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard, *Growth or Decline?*, in *The Church Today* (Chicago, 1953) 102-128.

²¹ J. Keuppens, *Mariologiae compendium*, 2nd ed. (Heverle-Louvain, 1947) 36-51; M. Gordillo, S.J., *Mariologia Orientalis* (Rome, 1954) 150-167.

²² See above all J. B. Carol, O.F.M., *De Corredemptione Beatæ Virginis Mariæ disquisitio positiva* (Vatican City, 1950); also C. Dillenschneider, C.S.S.R., *Le mystère de la Corédemption mariale* (Paris, 1951); R. Laurentin, *Le titre de Corédemptrice* (Paris, 1951); and for a different opinion, P. Rupprecht, O.S.B., *Zur marianischen Kontroverse*, in *TTZ* 59 (1950) 129-140.

Church also is called by God to take its part in the salvific work of Christ; the members of Christ have their active share in the saving mission of their Head. The Church as Christ's spouse, is joined to Him in the age-long process of saving men through the active co-operation of men.

Let us accept as fact, for the purpose of this essay, that Mary's coredemptive function was not confined to the merely remote co-operation with the Savior that reached no further than her *fiat* to the divine invitation to bring the Redeemer forth into the world, but that it extended to an immediate, proximate and active share in the sufferings and death of Christ; that her dynamic union with Him in this "objective" redemption was by way of subordinate merit and satisfaction for the whole of mankind.²³ In this Mary alone, of all the world, was God's chosen instrument and the representative of all, as she was in her divine Motherhood. And here also she enjoyed a priority, both in time and in the nature of her role, over the Church. She actively co-operated, therefore, with her Son in bringing the Church into existence, and this for a twofold reason. She was the willing source, as we have said, of that human nature which the Word of God joined to Himself in hypostatic union. In her coredemptive role she became an active participant in the loving acceptance and oblation of Christ's sufferings, and her own, for the ransom of men, and also for the building up of the Church as the divinely planned instrumentality for the distribution of the spiritual fruits of the sacrifice of Calvary. Before the coming of the Church there was Mary. She was the personification of this spouse of Christ yet to come, living and acting and suffering in vital union with the Redeemer, from the beginning of His saving mission at Nazareth to its consummation on the cross.

²³ An excellent summary of the points in controversy in Vollert, *art. cit.*, 581-593; cf. Dillenschneider, *op. cit.*, *passim*, and Carol, *Our Lady's Coredemption*, in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M., 2 (Milwaukee, 1957) 377-425.

No member of the Church, of course, other than the Blessed Virgin contributed thus actively to the work of the redemption itself, the "objective" redemption, as we have called it. But there is an analogous privilege granted to the other members of the Mystical Body. It is part of the Christian's vocation that he is empowered to make positive contribution, by his prayers, works and sufferings, to the salvation of his fellow men. This empowerment flows from the very fact that he is a member of the mystical Christ. Because of his vital union with the Head of the Body he can add his mite to the common treasury of the Church. This personal supernatural activity of the members combines to make real and vitally effective the coredemptive function of the Church; thus the Church becomes in a sense coredemptrix of herself, actively co-operating in her own salvation. But all this is in the order of "subjective" redemption. It is solely concerned with the application, to the component membership of Christ's Mystical Body, of the fruits of the one redemptive act on Calvary in which Mary alone, and not the Church, joined by active participation.²⁴

The Church, it must be added, co-operates in the distribution of the fruits of Christ's death and resurrection most effectively of all, perhaps, in its other aspect as Christ's representative in the world, as His chosen instrument for the transmission of grace to the men of all ages, by the exercise of its hierarchical functions of teaching, ruling and sanctifying men. This is a kind of active participation in the Lord's redemptive work that Mary never shared. Christ Himself is living and working in the world in and through His Church. This is His Body, these are His members; and through them He is at work among us. Even in her lifetime on earth the Blessed Mother played no part in this side of the Church's

²⁴ Cf. Vollert, *art. cit.*, 587-593. For a different view, H. Rahner, *op. cit.*, 56-75.

mission. She was never part of the Church teaching, or of the priestly or governing hierarchy.

This truth is rooted in the fundamentally different relationship our Lady bears to Christ, in contrast to the relationship between Christ and the Church as administrator of the means and instruments of salvation entrusted to it. The active administration of the sacrificial rite and sacramental system which is so striking a characteristic of the Church in action, has been put into the hands of a comparative minority of the Church's membership. And this sacramental system belongs to the order of sign and symbol. It reaches into the ontological world only through its efficacious symbolism. But Mary's relationship with Christ completely transcends this symbolic order of things. It remains always in the order of the *real*. Her fundamental relation with her Son is real with all the reality of the true motherhood by which she formed within her body the body of the Son of God; with all the reality of her poignant union with the very real sufferings and death of that Son on the cross. What part should she have had in the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, or in the administration of the sacramental signs, when she had brought into the world the giver of all sacramental signs, and had shared so intimately in the redemptive sacrifice which was the source of all the meaning and all the efficacy of the sacrifice of the Mass? ²⁵

Such considerations, together with what has been said about Mary's sanctity, suggest that there lives within the Church of Christ an order of realities of more profound significance than even the reality of the hierarchical powers exercised by a minority of the Church's members. Important as these are, they exist only to effect, to preserve, to increase what is the very life of the Church on earth, the supernatural reality, that is, of faith, of grace, of charity. And it is in the

²⁵ Laurentin, *Queen of Heaven* (Dublin, 1956) 69-70; 109-111.

order of this profoundly important reality of supernatural life that Mary is the forerunner and exemplar of the Church. It was in the extraordinary perfection of this inner supernatural life that she personified the Church before it ever came to be. It is in that same perfection that she remains forever the model and the stimulus to all the members of Christ's Body. And it is to make possible their imitation of her example in this perfection that she was privileged to take her active part in the acquisition of the graces without which no such supernatural life is conceivable.

And finally let us add: by her co-operation with Christ in the sufferings and death that meant the world's salvation, the Mother of God earned a new right to be called the Mother of men. Her Son, by meriting the graces of the redemption, became by right the Head of His Mystical Body. Mary by her share in acquiring this universal merit became the Mother of all mankind. It was in the hour of her sharing in the passion that redeemed us that Christ cried out: "Mother, behold thy son."²⁶

Eschatological Type

We may say, then, that through all the days of her earthly life the Virgin Mother of God personified in its perfection all that the Church was to become in its own manner and degree in days to come. Before the Church ever was, Mary was—holy, immaculate, virgin in body and in faith and in love. Prior to the advent of the Church she was already united with Christ, making with Him one life in the oneness of charity. Before the Church was born into the world she prepared for that birth by her union with Christ's sufferings that were the birthpangs of His Mystical Body.

Thus antecedent to and transcendent over the Church through the days of her life, the Blessed Mother was equally

²⁶ F. M. Braun, O.P., *La Mère des fidèles* (Paris, 1953) esp. 100-129.

the prototype of the Church in the manner of her departure from earth to heaven. If, as seems most likely, her way to heaven was, as was her Son's, through the portals of death,²⁷ no one will doubt that in her meeting with the common fate of humankind, Christian death in union with Christ reached the pinnacle of its perfection. Example and inspiration join in this joyous passing to leave a lasting memorial to faith and hope and charity and their role in the personal eschatology of the members of Christ's Church.

But above all it is in her bodily Assumption into heaven that our Lady performs a function of both final and exemplary causality in relation to the Church. In Mary risen with Christ and "ascended into heaven" in glory of body and soul the Church cannot fail to see itself on the road to the finale of its own mysterious history.²⁸ In Mary, the greatest of its members, who had preceded it in all other perfections, the Church here sees how it is in its collectivity to reach its ultimate goal and its promised plenitude. As Mary stands in bodily presence beside her glorified Son, she personifies, as never before, the Church that is in the end to join her and her Son in glory of soul and body, without fear of further failure. The Blessed Mother knows today in heaven what the Church which she so beautifully prefigures will know only at the end of time: the final proof of faith preserved, the answer to Christian hope, and the consummation of Christian love made perfect. It is part of the mysterious grandeur of

²⁷ Cf. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., *The Testimony of the Patristic Age Concerning Mary's Death*, in *MS* 8 (1957) 58-99; also the other papers on Mary's death in the same issue of that publication. For a different view, cf. B. Farrell, C.P., *The Immortality of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in *TS* 16 (1955) 591-606.

²⁸ Laurentin, *op. cit.*, 114-127; H. Rahner, *op. cit.*, 116-126; J. Loosen, S.J., *Zusammenhang des Dogmas von der leiblichen Aufnahme Mariens in den Himmel mit den übrigen Mariengeheimnissen*, in the symposium *Die leibliche Himmelfahrt Mariens* (Frankfurt a. M., 1950) 78-82; O. Semmelroth, S.J., *Der übermarianische Ertrag des neuen Dogmas*, *ibid.*, 89-95.

Mary's Assumption that it illuminates so brilliantly the way in which the prototype of the Church stands apart from and above the Church she images by the very fact that she has already realized in her own person what the Church is one day to experience in the attainment of its collective destiny.²⁹

CONCLUSION

But the day of that ultimate consummation is not yet at hand; the time for the imitation of the Mother of God is still with the Church of God. Mary remains for us what she has always been, the prototype, the exemplar and the inspiration of all the members of the Body of Christ. The imitation of our Lady remains a keystone in the edifice of Christian sanctity and perfection. And if it is still true that all that is most proper to Mary's place in the economy of salvation seems, at first glance, beyond all possibility of reproduction in the lives of Christ's faithful, we have now to add, on the other hand, that what is most profoundly important in the history of her life on earth *is* within the scope and the potentialities of every Christian.

What is central in all supernatural holiness is a close and lasting union of the creature with his God. This strong and unshakeable oneness with the Author of the supernatural is at the heart of all Christian sanctity. This is a oneness with God that has God alone as its author; the creature is always the recipient of a divine communication of goodness that transforms and elevates him beyond all the powers and exigencies inherent in his created nature. God gives; man receives.³⁰ And here, above all else, Mary is the model and the inspiration of the Christian. The active, eager and completely self-

²⁹ Cf. H. Rondet, S.J., *Assomption et Corédemption*, in *SM* 6 (1950) 151-173, esp. 169.

³⁰ St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, 2-2, q. 85, a. 8. Cf. A. Ferland, *Commentarius in Summam D. Thomae. De Verbo Incarnato* (Montreal, 1956) 91-92.

immolating receptivity to God's outpouring goodness that marked her life, from her earliest *fiat* to her *Nunc dimittis*, stand forever as the perfect exemplification of the Christian response to the divine initiative, and as the ultimate secret of all sanctification. If man is to be saved, as in God's design he clearly is to be saved, through human co-operation and human response, then never in the realm of the pure creature has there been an example more worthy of imitation than the inspiring image of the one perfect member of the Mystical Body that is Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of men.

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