

2-23-1973

## Theological Reflections on the Virgin Birth

Herbert W. Richardson

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)



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

---

### Recommended Citation

Richardson, Herbert W. (1973) "Theological Reflections on the Virgin Birth," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 24, Article 7, Pages 66-82.

Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol24/iss1/7](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol24/iss1/7)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu), [ecommons@udayton.edu](mailto:ecommons@udayton.edu).

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The history of dogmatic theology involves the constant struggle to clarify single issues as well as to relate single issues to larger doctrinal complexes. For this reason, it can be the case that a single topic, e.g., the virgin birth, may wait a long time before the theological situation has developed sufficiently for it to find its proper relation to the whole system of Christian theology. The time has come, however, when we can begin to understand more fully the mysteries associated with the life of Mary. This is the case because of a prior organic theological development which now provides an illuminating perspective in terms of which we can organize scriptural data and previous theological suggestions.

In this essay, the meaning of the virginal conception will be considered in relation to three questions: (1) whether the virginal conception might not have an inner-trinitarian *ratio*; (2) whether the model for understanding the virginal conception might not be the non-sexual generation of the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; and (3) whether the virginal conception is not the archetypal prophetic act reported in Scripture and, therefore, also the paradigm case of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. These three questions will be treated in three separate sections of the essay.

After discussing these issues, I shall then point out how—in our reflection on Mariological issues—we have also been forced to reflect directly upon the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is because these two doctrines are so intrinsically related that they can only be explicated theologically when they are explicated *together*. The recognition of their complication is typical of the most recent work in Mariology and determines

the present way of stating the theological question. Such a recognition is also to be found in the *Credo of the People of God*, proclaimed by Paul VI in 1968. These several points, and their implications, shall become clearer in the concluding section.

I. *The Inner-Trinitarian Ground and Theological Necessity of the Virgin Birth*

There are several considerations that drive us to consider the virginal conception in relation to the dogmatic formulations of the Trinity. These considerations lead us, as we shall see, to the conclusion that the virginal conception has not merely an historical, but, more especially, an inner-trinitarian ground. This ground is, then, its theological necessity—for an inner-trinitarian ground is the basis of all theological reasons whatsoever.

There are two lines of theological development that are crucial for understanding the place of the virginal conception within the doctrine of the Trinity: one leads to the dogmatic proclamation that Jesus Christ is twice-begotten; the other leads to the dogmatic proclamation that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. We shall discuss these separately.

The Church clarified and deepened its affirmation that Jesus Christ possesses both a divine and a human nature by affirming, at II Constantinople in 553, that He is also "twice begotten." He is begotten before all time from the Father and, in these last days, is begotten of the virgin Mary. This affirmation that Jesus Christ has two distinct beginnings (*duas nativitates*) was required by the debate over whether Mary is the mother merely of the human nature of the preexistent and *once*-begotten Christ, or whether she is the mother of the second Person of *twice*-begotten, and that Mary is truly the mother of the Eternal Son of God, became the theological teaching of the Church. In brief, Mary is *theotokos* and not merely *christotokos*.



Behind this debate lies the question whether the conception and birth of Jesus Christ is the very conception and birth of God Himself. The issue at stake in the *theotokos* formula is whether the incarnation is the beginning of all the ways and works of God, or whether it is merely an external work by which God acts in, with, and under flesh—but not *as flesh*. The struggle of the Church was always to affirm not merely that God was present in flesh, but that God was present *as flesh*—for only thereby could the Church's faith that God Himself had died and been raised for us come to adequate expression. In its struggle to preserve this affirmation, the early Church held firmly to the symbol of the virginal conception and birth. "Had it not been for the Virgin Birth," argues Douglas Edwards, "it is highly improbable that the Doctrine of the Incarnation would have ever gained a prominent lodging in the human mind." With this judgment I concur, and point especially to the fact that in its struggle to affirm that Jesus Christ was not simply fully God, but also fully man, the Church adverted finally to the virginal conception, the double-begottenness of the Son of God, and the *literal* appellation of Mary as *theotokos*.

What this means, and this is the first point on which I wish to build my argument, is that the person conceived (and *truly* conceived!) in the womb of Mary is not a created person, but a divine Person who assumes from her His human nature. Why the moment of conception is so important is that the person (i.e., the individual existent named by a proper name) is "created" in the act of conception. The Person is what is conceived! And the Person who is conceived, really and truly "begun," in the womb of Mary is the Son of God.

Of course, the Church understood that this begetting of the Son of God in the womb of Mary was neither His first nor His sole begetting. "Before all time, the Son was begotten of the Father . . . and now, in these last days, the Son is begotten of the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary." The mystery of the

two natures of the Son is both reinforced and heightened by the mystery of his double begottenness. But what is urgent for our point is to realize that, with this formulation, the virginal conception is placed alongside the eternal begetting of the Son—in a kind of parallelism whose “theo-grammatical function” is to negate all efforts to speculate behind the incarnation into a will or nature of God that might exist apart from Christ.

The second development in the history of theology that is urgent for the issue we are considering actually develops similarly to, though somewhat later than, the *theotokos* formulation. In the Western Church, trinitarian reflection and liturgical usage gradually led to the elevation of the *filioque* to dogmatic status. The *filioque* affirms that, within the eternal life of the divine Trinity, the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from both the Father and the Son (*filioque*). Various reasons can be adduced for this development and, as we know, it later became a point of dispute between western and eastern Christians.

From a dogmatic point of view, we can see in the *filioque* dogma and ascription to the Son of a power of “begetting” that had, in the earliest formulations of the Trinity, been the special prerogative of the Father and the mark of divine monarchy. To add the *filioque* to the trinitarian formulation is to ascribe to the Son and equality in the monarchic function that had been, in earliest times, the peculiar mark of the Father as the Trinity’s *fons et origo*. There can be no doubt that the addition of the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed is a legitimate explication (within the third article) of something that is already said clearly, albeit in other words, within the second article. The Eastern Church never denied the correctness of the teaching, but only the propriety of making an addition to an ecumenical creed. Moreover, the *filioque* clause, dealing especially—as it did—with the issue of inner-trinitarian generation, ascribed to the Son the distinctive power that had been reserved to the Father in Neo-Platonic “trinities” and thereby



excluded speculative interpretations of the Trinity in a philosophical or subordinationist direction—at least with respect to a subordination of the Son! It raised the question whether such an “upgrading” of the role of the Son within inner-trinitarian life did not tend to subordinate the Spirit too much to the other two divine Persons. And it must be confessed that in Protestantism, at least, the tendency has been to deny the full personhood of the Holy Spirit and to regard the Spirit more as an impersonal instrument of the working of Christ in the world. (For example, both the now deceased Episcopal Bishop James Pike as well as the distinguished theologian Cyril Richardson have explicitly advocated Christian “binitarianism.”) On the Catholic side, it must also be pointed out that although the full personhood of the Holy Spirit has never been in doubt, the Spirit has not yet received adequate doctrinal development in conjunction with a number of obviously pneumatological issues, e.g., ecclesiology, sacramentology, and—important for our purposes today—Mariology.

These considerations are intended to call to our attention the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity has not, as yet, received the fullness of its dogmatic development. I am interested especially in urging an awareness of the fact that the *filioque* dogma, howsoever correct it is in explicating what is already present the Creed, does pose a question with respect to the Holy Spirit. What is the appropriate parallel to the *filioque* in the case of the Spirit, something that also gives recognition to the Spirit's share in the divine monarchy? To answer this question, I wish to present my argument regarding the inner-trinitarian significance of the virginal conception.

According to the creeds, Jesus Christ is conceived by the Holy Spirit. What is the status of this begetting? According to second Constantinople, the one who is conceived by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary is literally, and without any analogy of metaphorical qualification, the second Person of the Trinity, the very Son of God. This begetting of the Son, while second

to his eternal begottenness from the Father, is inseparable from that and in no sense subordinate to it. Therefore, just as we must say—literally, and without any analogical usage—that Mary is *theotokos*, the Mother of God, so we must say—literally, and without any analogical usage—that the Spirit begets the Son. Just as we must say—literally, and without any analogical usage—that the Son is begotten by the Father, so we must say—literally, and without any analogical usage—that the Son is also begotten by the Spirit (for the Son is twice-begotten). This is the *spirituque*. The Son is begotten by the Father *and the Spirit (spirituque)*, just as the Spirit proceeds from both the Father *and the Son (filioque)*. In this affirmation, grounded in the virginal conception of the Son of God, a certain development of trinitarian reflection attains its intrinsic completeness—for here we see that the Spirit shares the inner-trinitarian monarchy with both the Father and the Son, and in a respect that is fully equal in dignity to them.

The demand for explicating this *spirituque* provides the ultimate theological ground of the virginal conception, whose rationale can now be seen to be intrinsic to the internal life of God Himself. Why a virginal conception? Because only thereby is the full equality in dignity and monarchy of the Persons of the triune God established, and only thereby is the creative freedom of the Holy Spirit as a distinctive Person *vis-à-vis* the Father and the Son clearly maintained. It is important also to acknowledge the implication of this view, namely, that the virginal conception itself is hereby taken up into the inner-trinitarian life—for here not a creature, but the eternal Son of God, is begotten. But this point, far from detracting from our argument, both underscores the full dignity of the virginal conception itself and also allows us to consider it as the exemplary case of the Spirit's indwelling (a point to which we shall later come).

Suppose the Church were, in the future, to give this *spirituque* dogmatic status. Would this be an addition to the



creeds? It is something new? Or is it not, rather, something—like the *filioque*—that is already there? The Western Church argued in behalf of the *filioque* that it was no addition to the creeds, but was only an explication of something that was already there. The Eastern Church agreed that it was already there and, for this reason, it was unnecessary to add it. But the desire in western theology (its rationalism, so to say) has always been to explicate the implications of revelation, to state clearly and “scientifically” what is already there. For this reason, we may argue that a formal addition of a *spirituque*, alongside the *filioque*, would be a legitimate and intrinsic explication of trinitarian dogma—and one that would give to the virginal conception its proper ultimate place in Christian theology.

But is the *spirituque* “already there”? It is already there if the credal affirmation “conceived by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary” is understood to refer to the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. In this case, the creeds clearly place the “begotten by the Father before all times” in apposition with “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” It is already there to the extent that the Church is clear that the one begotten in Mary’s womb is “the God who is God-man.” But to the extent that some of the faithful—in an age when naturalistic interpretations of all Christian things abound—are unclear about these things, then the addition of the *spirituque* would be not only a legitimate explication, but perhaps also a helpful clarification of the mystery of faith.

## II. *The Filioque as the Model of Non-Sexual Generation, and its Normative Character for All Human Procreation Whatsoever.*

In the argument I have outlined above, the extraordinary character of the conception of Jesus Christ is necessary by virtue of who He is. Only God can beget God. The New Testament faith that Jesus is not man pure and simple, but



Emmanuel ("God with us"), is the necessary context for understanding that He must have a conception and birth which is adequate theologically to account for the dignity of His Person. This is not a matter of vacuous or negotiable piety; it is a matter of intellectual necessity.

The Eternal Son of God cannot be begotten of a human father, for then He would be a created person such as we are. He must be begotten of God, by a mode of union that is other than sexual—for God's generative power does not work by the means of sexuality. The creative power of God is by his Word and Spirit, and so must His union with Mary be. The conception of the Son of God by Mary must be from her union with the Spirit of God. That is, it must take place in a non-sexual way and wholly apart from the intervention of any human father.

How can we conceive a non-sexual mode of union that is person-creative, or capable of begetting a person? Is there a way we can understand, theologically, the dynamics of the virginal conception? I believe there is a way. The answer is to be sought by asking whether we know of any other cases of non-sexual generation of divine persons, for such other cases serve as models and guides for our thinking. There is such a case, and it lies, quite conveniently, within the parameters we have previously scanned. Within the Church's affirmation of the *filioque* is the conviction that there is an inner-trinitarian power that is person-creative—a power in which all persons, created and uncreated, participate. This person-creative power, says St. Augustine, is the love that the Father and the Son have for one another. In their mutual love, a third person is generated—the Holy Spirit, who is, at one and the same time, both the bond of their love and its own unique hypostatic existence. Christians know from this that not merely is the love of the Father and the Son fecund, but that *love itself is such*.

The mutual indwelling, or bond of deepest love, from which proceeds the Spirit of God is itself the model of a non-sexual

union that is person-generative. As such, this inner-trinitarian act is not merely an analogy to, but the very foundation and form of the virginal conception. Just as, in the procession of the Spirit, the Father and the Son generate the Spirit by virtue of their mutual love, so in the virginal conception the love of Mary for God and God for Mary (who is the remnant of Israel and the one in whom God wills to fulfill His covenant) conceives the child who is in her womb. This mutual love of God and Mary is *itself* the generative act. No sexual union is needed, for it is mutual love and not sex that is person-creative. Just as in the divine Trinity, the love of the two divine Persons generates the third, so in the incarnation, the perfect love of the two covenant partners is the sufficient cause of conception. The cause of begetting *persons* is, essentially, mutual and perfect love.

This argument takes the mutual love of the Father and Son from which proceeds the Spirit as the model of the virginal conception, and it sees the conception of Jesus Christ as the result of the perfect love of God and Mary, the covenanted partners, for one another. Mary (as the representative symbol of Israel) is the bride of God; God is her covenanted husband. The prophetic literature abounds in this particular metaphorical identification. But precisely these identifications make us aware that the love between God and Mary is not *sui generis*, but of a type (though perfected) that exists among all persons. For this reason, I wish to extend my argument regarding the cause of the virginal conception and suggest that *in all cases* of procreation among persons, we tend to regard the true cause of conception as the love of the partners and to deny to the sexual instrumentalities other than an accidental role. If this is the case (and I hope to show that it is), then Mary's virginity detracts in no essential way from her full participation in a truly human conception.

Those who propose that Mary could only have conceived by sexual union assume that human procreation must take place



(and ought to take place) by this particular instrumentality. They assume that sexual union is the "natural," "right," and "essential" cause of procreation. But this assumption presupposes that the present mode of human procreation is natural and right rather than being the unnatural distortion resulting from human sin. Such a presupposition concerning the naturalness of sexual intercourse is dubious. In their integral state before the fall, Adam and Eve would have become parents of children in a non-sexual way—or, at least, by a mode of sexual union that, being without concupiscence, would have been totally other than that we know today. Because of the sinlessness of Mary and because of her symbolic identifications with Eve, it might be possible to argue that had Eve not sinned she too would have borne her children virginally. On this speculation, Mary's virginal conception would be interpreted as a restoration of the form of procreation characteristic of integral human nature. However, such a line of reflection, perhaps important for the future, is not necessary to the present argument.

For the present argument, all that is necessary is to show that even in our ordinary ways of thinking and talking, we do not claim that sexual union is the real and right cause of procreation. Rather, in ordinary ways of speaking about parenthood, we assume that love rather than sex should be the cause of procreation. For example, in a case where a couple that loves is sexually sterile, we say, "That's too bad. They, of all people, ought to have children." Such a couple is encouraged to adopt children in order to rectify this "unrightness." In this case, we regard their sexual sterility as accidental and as no bar to true parenthood.

Conversely, when there is a conception because two persons have intercourse without love (as in the case of rape), we say "This is wrong, even unnatural. There should be no child when they did not love one another." Once again, this rhetoric shows that, even in popular thinking, love rather than sex tends



to be regarded as the normative and essential cause of procreation. Not sexual, but moral mutuality is experienced as the right (i.e., the essential) cause of human procreation. That this has not always been the case—and is not always today regarded as the case—is conceded. But in my book on the evolution of sexuality, I have shown that the whole history of human sexuality since the time of the virgin birth and early Christianity can be understood as a transformation taking place under the influence of this Christian ideal: that sex is brought increasingly within the scope of love, so that love will be understood as the true cause of sex and of all procreation. The extent to which this transformation has taken place is a matter of dispute. But I hazard the judgment that although in the past people have regarded sexual union as the sole and proper cause of procreation, few persons today would regard sex as even a proper cause unless they could also understand sexual union to be controlled by love. And from this point, there is but a short step to the ideal of love alone as the proper and essential cause of procreation. That is, it is but a short step to regarding the virginal motherhood of Mary as a model and regulative norm for all human love and procreation.

### III. *The Virginal Conception and the Life of Mary as the Paradigm Case of the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit*

Without any qualification of or derogation from Mary's divine motherhood, it is still possible to ask whether this motherhood is an ultimate category or whether it is an act that belongs to a more general case. What is the characteristic mark of Mary's motherhood? What is her peculiar qualification for this vocation? Tradition speaks of her righteousness and her eager acquiescence in the will of God. Jesus speaks of her motherhood as consisting in "knowing and doing the will of God." The qualification of Mary for divine motherhood is not her biological suitability, not her family background, not her personal intelligence or beauty. The qualification of Mary

to bear the Word of God (and she *has* such a qualification) is her faithful love to God, who is her covenanted partner. Mary is the faithful remnant of Israel; that is, she is Israel truly.

From the point of view of the history of salvation, the virgin birth must be seen not as a *sui generis* act that has no predecessor or analogue, but rather must be seen as an act of prophecy. In the Old Testament, the prophets are those who—acknowledging the holy righteousness of God and yet trusting in His covenant faithfulness to redeem Israel in spite of her disobedience—bring the Word of God to the people. Indeed, it is the prophets, in their despair at the possibility of a genuine repentance in Israel, who envision her future redemption by a coming Messiah. Bearing the Word, even hoping for a Word made flesh, that is the mark of Israelite prophecy.

Of the prophets, Calvin said that their utterances were like incarnations (i.e. "accommodations") of the Word of God. And not only all their utterances, but also all their deeds. The prophets did not always, we should recall, speak in words alone. They spoke by symbolic acts (Jeremiah), by eschatological deeds (Elijah), and by the very way in which they named their children and married their wives (Hosea). The prophet was one who sought to bear the word of God to Israel not only in the utterances of his mouth, but by his obedience and the symbolic form of his life.

From this point of view, the faithful obedience of Mary to God must be seen as an archetypal act of prophecy. Mary's "*fiat*" to the announcing angel is her full and final acquiescence in the prophetic vocation to bear the Word of God and allow her own words to withdraw in silence behind the One whom she bore and who speaks through her. Moreover, not merely in bearing her child, but in the motherhood which is the form of her entire life is Mary a prophet. Indeed, she is the perfect prophet. In all she does in her entire life of serving the Word and, at the last, in her following Him to the Cross in obedi-



ence to His commandment, she proclaims Him. This is the explicit act of her divine maternity—and this divine maternity is the archetypal act of prophecy. Mary knows the will of God and does it. Against the prophetic form of her life, every other prophet's utterance and act is to be measured and judged.

From these considerations, we conclude that the virginal conception is not a generically unique act, but is, rather, the most perfect case of prophetic speaking. It is the preeminent act of divine revelation, of inspiration, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As such, we must take the virginal conception as the normative instance of the indwelling and inspiration of the Holy Spirit and must seek, from it, to develop a dogmatic formula equivalent (in the pneumatological order) to the "one person in two natures" formula in Christology. How could this be done?

One of the points at which the development of the doctrine of the Spirit has lagged behind dogmatic developments in Christology is with respect to a clear specification of the modality of the Spirit's assumption of the creature in the course of His divine mission. In the mission of the Son, the Church has clarified that in becoming incarnate Jesus Christ is "one person in two natures." But the Church has not yet clarified the terms through which we should understand the Spirit's union with the creature of His indwelling and inspiring work. Herbert Muehlen, the Paderborn theologian, has suggested that the best formulation would be that "In His inspiring work, or divine indwelling, the Spirit is united with the creature as *one person in two persons*." Whereas the Son becomes incarnate by assuming a created nature into the unity of His person, the Spirit inspires and indwells the creature by assuming a created person into the unity of His person. In this union with the Spirit there is a perichoresis (or mutual indwelling) of subjects such that one can speak of them as two and yet inspired infallibly by the One. For example, St. Paul says that he prays and yet it is the Spirit who prays in and through him. Or again,



the prophets speak and yet it is the Spirit who speaks through them. Or finally, and preeminently, the Virgin Mary conceives the Son and yet it is the Spirit who conceives the Son in her. "Conceived by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. . . ." Two persons indwelling one another and yet acting infallibly as one.

The virginal conception—considered as the pre-eminent case of prophetic revelation—must be regarded, together with the other Scriptural cases of prophetic speaking, as the fundamental datum from which an understanding and dogmatic formulation defining the special mission of the Spirit in indwelling and inspiring is developed. To make this point is one of the primary reasons for classifying the virginal conception as an act of prophecy—and there can be nothing against it, since we are invited to reflect on the relation of these two activities of the Spirit by the creeds. In the creeds, the particular activities ascribed to the Spirit in His special mission are "conceiving the Son of God with the Virgin Mary" and "speaking through the prophets." But there are other theological advantages to be gained by regarding the virginal conception as an act of prophecy. I shall, in conclusion, briefly mention one or two topics that are worthy of further theological development.

To regard the virginal conception as an act of prophetic activity is to link Mary's motherhood with Israel's religious symbols and lay the foundation for developing Biblical parallels between Mary and Israel, on the one hand, and Mary and Jesus Christ, on the other. In the former case, in order to give substance to the affirmation that Mary is the true Israel whose faithful love God honors by taking as His bride, it is important to demonstrate that Mary's life recapitulates and embodies the essence of Israel's history. Unless the events in her life are linked theologically with the prophetic, priestly, and regal manifestations of divine revelation in the history of Israel, no recapitulating parallels between Mary and Israel can be developed—and the claim that the virginal conception is God's fulfillment of His covenant with Israel loses its substance. It is

for this reason that it is important to subsume the events of Mary's life under the categories of Israel's religious faith, for example, to subsume her virginal conception under Israelite prophecy as its most perfect act. Only through the introduction of such mediating categories as "prophecy" can the full significance of Mary's life within God's covenant with Israel be articulated with theological cogency.

The same considerations govern the development of parallelisms between the life of Mary and the life of Jesus Christ. These parallelisms are always to be understood within the framework of God's faithfulness to His covenant with Israel—and, within this framework, Mary's constant association with Christ in His earthly and heavenly ministry is the actual reception by the faithful remnant, by Israel, of her Messiah. Israel, in the person of Mary, is the one who has long waited, and she is the one who now receives His redemption and shares in His redeeming work. Without interpreting the life of Mary through the categories that are common to the history of Israel and the ministry of Christ—namely, prophet, priest, and king—the associations and parallelisms between the life of Mary and the ministry of Jesus Christ fail to find their proper covenantal context and are not articulated in their full soteriological significance.

Mary's true dignity and exemplary spiritual heroism are best seen by interpreting the whole of her life association with the Lord as sharing in His prophetic, priestly, and regal ministries. Mary is the preeminent Christian because of the preeminence of her participation in the covenantal work of Christ. To help articulate this covenantal participation, in both its exemplary and soteriological aspects, is the virtue of understanding her virginal conception as a prophetic act and associating her, at this point, not only with the long tradition of Israelite prophecy, but also with Christ in His own prophetic work. To associate her with Him also in His priestly dying on the cross, and regal assumption to the right hand of God, are no less neces-



sary. But the exploration of these themes must await another time and another paper.

#### IV. Conclusion

The three arguments developed in this essay are not unrelated to one another, but are theological confirmations and strengthenings of one another. Taken together, they might be regarded as the key elements in an adequate understanding of the Holy Spirit, for this is the common term that is operative within all three. The first argument sees the theological necessity of the virginal conception to be rooted in the logic of God's inner-trinitarian life and in the fittingness that there be a *spirituque* that harmonizes with and balances the *filiouque*. The second argument sees the model of non-sexual generation of persons to be the procession of the Spirit within the Trinity itself, and it interprets the virginal conception as formally like this. The third argument relates the *conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto* to the *locutus est per prophetas* of the creeds, and it concludes that the virginal conception is the preeminent act of prophecy and the paradigm case of the Spirit's indwelling. It concludes, from this fact, that this is the case from which a dogmatic definition of the mode of the Spirit's indwelling in His mission in the world should be developed and validated.

The theological perspective governing this essay has been, therefore, to interpret the virginal conception from the point of view of the Holy Spirit and to interpret the Holy Spirit from the point of view of the life of Mary. *These two dogmatic loci stand in immediate relation to one another.* My essay aims to vindicate this claim and, as such, takes up the perspective suggested by Paul VI in his *Credo of the People of God*. In this document, Paul locates the article on Mary and her role in the divine economy in immediate conjunction with the article on the Holy Spirit, placing both *before* the articles on sin and redemption. The theoretical fruitfulness of this order of topics has been explored by this essay. I wish



only to reiterate that, in so doing, what has been developed is not merely a deeper understanding of the life of Mary, but also a deeper penetration into the work of the Holy Spirit—for these two realities can be understood only together.

Just as, in its first centuries, the dogmatic definitions of the incarnation of the Son were clarified by the Church, so now we are reaching towards a deeper understanding of the indwelling work of the Spirit. Just as, in the first centuries, the Church came to understand that the mission of the Son is to assume human nature into the life of God, so today the Church is seeking to understand that the mission of the Spirit is to assume a human person into the life of God. Mary is that human person—and we are all, through God's grace, someday to share her destiny.

REV. HERBERT RICHARDSON

*Institute of Christian Thought*  
*St. Michael's College, Toronto*