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THE MOTHER OF FAIR LOVE: THE BEAUTY OF THE EVER-VIRGIN FOR THE VOCATIONS OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

Kevin M. Clarke, PhD

The beauty of the Virgin-Mother gives spiritual life to her children. In that regard, this article will explore the writings of some of the Church Fathers, the Marian psalter attributed to St. Bonaventure, and the theology-of-the-body audiences of Pope St. John Paul II to show how Mary is mother of the spiritual life and the exemplar of the life of the elect.

I am the mother of fair love,
and fear, and knowledge, and holy hope:
I therefore, being eternal, am given to all my children
which are named of him (Sirach 24:18).¹

¹ ἐγὼ μήτηρ τῆς ἀγαπήσεως τῆς καλῆς,

καὶ φόβου καὶ γνώσεως καὶ τῆς ὀσίας ἐλπίδος,

δίδομαι οὖν πᾶσι τοῖς τέκνοις μου, ἀειγενῆς τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

I. Introduction

In certain manuscripts of Sirach,² wisdom proclaims herself the “mother of fair love” (Sir 24:18), a title often attributed to Mary. This paper will explore the beauty of the Mother of God *for* the various calls or vocations of Christian life. The word “for” is quite intentional here, since hers is no mere appearance to gratify sense perception, but a beauty chosen for God and, therefore, able to elevate, to save, to purify all the creation. Since the radiance of this beauty penetrates into the whole created order, it also does so for the sake of each believer and each vocation. The main sources for the reflections herein will be the dormition homilies of the Church Fathers, the Marian psalter attributed to St. Bonaventure, and the theology-of-the-body audiences of Pope St. John Paul II.

First, the Church Fathers’ homilies show how Mary’s bodily assumption is the eschatological sign for all believers, and, hence, the Virgin illumines the mystery of consecrated life especially. Furthermore, she plays an essential role in deification: “For if you had not gone before us, no one would ever become perfectly spiritual,” wrote St. Germanus, and “All

² Michael Maria Waldstein points out in the introduction of his forthcoming book, *Glory of the Logos in the Flesh: Saint John Paul’s Theology of the Body* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), “Sirach 24:18 according to Ziegler’s critical edition in the Göttingen Septuagint. Ziegler places this reading in the main text. The widely used manual edition by Rahlfs only reports this verse in the textual notes, which has led to a neglect of this reading. Ziegler’s reading is based on more extensive evidence” (printout, Dept. of Theology, Ave Maria University, 2014). Cf. also the Clementine Vulgate, from which the author of the Marian *Psalterium* clearly depended: “Ego mater pulchræ dilectionis, et timoris, et agnitionis, et sanctæ spei. In me gratia omnis viæ et veritatis: in me omnis spes vitæ et virtutis” (Sir 24:24–25; cf. Pss. 11 and 56 of the *Psalterium*). More on the *Psalterium* below.

things are made holy by your myrrh-like fragrance,” according to St. Andrew of Crete. Secondly, in exploring the Marian psalter, one encounters in Our Lady a beauty most desirable and fecund that bears fruit for those who praise her. This beauty speaks to the universal call to holiness (*universali vocatione ad sanctitatem*). Beauty is a thread woven throughout the psalter’s praise of the Virgin. Her body and her face are beautiful; her beauty is pedagogical: “Beautiful are your ways: and your paths are peaceful. In you shine forth the beauty of chastity, the light of justice, and the splendor of truth.” The psalmist³ even writes in the language of *eros* concerning the virtue of Mary: “I have coveted your chastity from my youth up.”

Finally, this article will show how the image of spousal love given by Pope St. John Paul II in his theology of the body points beyond Eve to Mary, the New Eve. He wrote, “Man appears in the visible world as the highest expression of the divine gift, because he bears within himself the inner dimension of the gift. And with it he carries into the world his particular likeness to God, with which he transcends and also rules his ‘visibility’ in the world, his bodiliness, his masculinity or femininity, his nakedness.” The femininity of the Virgin-Mother exists as *gift* to her Son, but as *sign* it also is a *sacrament* of divine love. In this section, particular attention will be paid to John Paul’s exegesis of the Song of Songs to see how the beauty of the vocation to spousal love is particularly illumined by the mutual love of Jesus and Mary and by the communion of persons in the

³ The *Psalterium* consists of 150 psalms written in the pattern of the book of Psalms. In this paper, I will refer to the author of the *Psalterium* as the psalmist. This is not to suggest that I do not believe St. Bonaventure to be the author of the work, but that as far as I know his authorship is not firmly attested or established by scholarship.

Holy Family. At the end, I will offer a unifying principle underlying the reflections.

II. The Assumption Homilies of the Fathers and the Bodily-Spiritual Excellence of the Virgin

This section will examine the Mariology of the Fathers and their theological way of understanding the Virgin's body, focusing particularly upon how the conciliar era naturally produced Mariological fruit. The post-Chalcedonian period will be the main focal point, for where Christology is richest and most fully developed, so is Mariology.⁴ Before arriving at that point, I will offer a few thoughts on the Mariology of the preceding centuries as a prolegomenon. As will become clear, the Virgin plays an instrumental role in the restoration of creation and the deification of humanity.

From the first centuries of the Church, the Virgin-Mother paradox has served the development of Christology. As the prophesied Virgin of Isaiah 7:14, she participates in the messianic advent. The Fathers of the Church were quick to grasp Our Lady's consequential role. In the early second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch forestalled any possibility of Docetism by anchoring the Christ-event in "reality." Christ's sufferings were real, following upon the truth of his Incarnation and birth. In fact, two of the three mysteries Ignatius locates in the silence (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ) of God are Mary's virginity (ἡ παρθενία Μαρίας) and her childbearing (ὁ τοκετός), mysteries to be loudly

⁴ This is, of course, not to negate the profound reflection on the Assumption of Our Lady that followed this era. Cf. Fr. Paul Haffner, "The End of Our Blessed Lady's Earthly Life, Her Glorious Assumption and Their Implications for Today," *De Maria Numquam Satis: The Significance of the Catholic Doctrines of the Blessed Virgin Mary for All People*, ed. Dr. Judith Marie Gentle and Dr. Robert Fastiggi (Washington: University Press of America, 2009), 80 ff.

proclaimed.⁵ Some decades later, St. Melito of Sardis in his *Peri Pascha* oration explicitly locates the Incarnation in the womb of the Virgin (διὰ παρθένου μήτρας).⁶ Perhaps this is the first such formulation in early Christianity, certainly one of the earliest articulations of the Mariological paradox. Melito here seems particularly concerned to preserve the agency of Christ, who “came forth a man” (προελθὼν ἄνθρωπος).⁷ Enfleshment and Mary’s virginity are theologically inseparable; Christ was enfleshed in the Virgin (ὁ ἐν παρθένῳ σαρκωθείς).⁸ Melito is well ahead of his times; accordingly, Perler observes that Melito

⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 19.1: Καὶ ἔλαθεν τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἢ παρθενία Μαρίας καὶ ὁ τοκετὸς αὐτῆς, ὁμοίως καὶ ὁ θάνατος τοῦ κυρίου· τρία μυστήρια κραυγῆς, ἅτινα ἐν ἡσυχία θεοῦ ἐπράχθη.

⁶ The Greek word μήτρα (womb) is not to be confused with μήτηρ (mother), though the words descend from the same root. It is interesting that Melito does not choose to use the word κοιλία, which also means “womb” and which was the word primarily used in the gospels to refer to a womb, particularly referring to Mary in Luke’s gospel (cf. Lk. 1:42, 2:21, 11:27). Semantically, there is little difference between μήτρα and κοιλία. One wonders, then, if Melito, being a skilled orator of the second sophistic, is guiding his audience toward recognizing the Virgin-Mother paradox.

⁷ *Peri Pascha* (=PP), 66, from Stuart G. Hall, ed. and trans., *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979). See also Ignatius’s use of this term in *Magn.* 8.2. Concerning the possibility that this could reflect a kind of gnostic emanation in Ignatius, which has been a tendency in some scholarship of the Apostolic Fathers, I concur with Vall’s rejection of such an idea and think that the same reasoning applies to Melito as well. Cf. Gregory Vall, *Learning Christ: Ignatius of Antioch & the Mystery of Redemption* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 258–271.

⁸ PP, 70.

is the first author who uses this verb σαρκώω.⁹ Melito sees the beauty in Our Lady, calling her “the lovely ewe-lamb” (τῆς καλῆς ἀμνάδος),¹⁰ an apparent reference to her purity, connecting the purity of the Virgin-Mother with the sacrificial offering of Christ the lamb (ὁ ἀμνός). About two centuries later, the first ecumenical councils brought greater Christological precision as the Church sought to articulate the symbol of Nicaea and First Constantinople. From this, there arose a Mariological crescendo, climaxing at the Council of Ephesus in 431. The triumph over Nestorius, when Cyril had successfully defended Mary’s title of *Theotokos*, would have seemed the zenith of Mariology. But to stop there would be like leaving a symphony after the first movement. The tension in Cyrillian Christology, particularly in his controversial “one nature” (μία φύσις) formula, would need the resolution provided in the following centuries. Further Christological developments would bring another crescendo for the Virgin-Mother.

Thus, perhaps one of the most fruitful eras for reflection on the body of Our Lady was that of the intra-conciliar period

⁹ Méli-ton de Sardes, *Sur la Pâque et fragments*: introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par Othmar Perler, Sources Chrétiennes, 123 (Paris:: Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 36 (cf. *PP*, 70). The first ecumenical council at Nicaea adopted this aorist passive participle, σαρκωθέντα, for Christ, but it was Constantinople in 381 that also inserted reference to Our Lady and to the Holy Spirit: καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς Παρθένου καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα.

¹⁰ *PP*, 71.

following Chalcedon ¹¹ and Second ¹² and Third Constantinople.¹³ Considering the dicta of these councils, it is no surprise that the Fathers began to fully appropriate the consequence of Mary for Christology. Fr. Brian Daley's important volume in the Popular Patristic Series gathers the assumption homilies of this era into one tome. In his introduction, he observes how the Marian sermons share a deep concern for theological reflection. He further shows how the body of the Virgin is a sign of future glory.

Because her humanity stands closest to the humanity of Jesus, which has passed through death to a new, indestructible life suffused with his own divinity, because she is still "one body (σύσσωμος)" with Jesus, Mary is the first to experience the full transformation of body and spirit—the

¹¹ The Council of Chalcedon (451) described the manner of the union of the two natures in the one person of Christ, that they were united without confusion, change, division, or separation. These Chalcedonian adverbs, ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαίρετως, ἀχωρίστως, would become a distinguishing mark in the writings of the Greek Fathers thenceforth.

¹² Constantinople II (553) clarified Chalcedon by describing the mode of union in the hypostasis of the Son, declaring that the human nature of the Son was not its own separate subject, but that all that Christ did could be attributed to the Eternal Son, one of the Trinity.

¹³ Constantinople III (681) resolved the difficulties of monothelitism and monenergism, which attempted to locate the willing faculty and the activity of the Son in His hypostasis. The Council followed St. Maximus the Confessor, identifying willing and activity as the property of the nature (*physis*).

“divinization” of what is human—that is promised to everyone who becomes “one body” with him in faith and baptism.¹⁴

Daley further observes that the Fathers composed their homilies in high rhetorical style of *encomia*, a type of delivery common in funeral orations. Unlike the oratory of *some* funeral orations, these words are not empty praises, nor are they mere flowers for her bier, as it were; on the contrary, these are divinized words in the context of a two-natures Christology. St. John of Damascus explains,

For the pagans honor the departed with funeral orations and eagerly work into them whatever details they consider attractive, so that the words of praise will be both a fitting tribute for the one being eulogized and an encouragement and an invitation to virtue for those left behind. Most of the time they weave such a speech out of legends and impossible inventions, since those being celebrated have, on their own, so little that is worthy of praise. How, then, shall we fail to seem wholly ridiculous if we shroud in deep silence what is radically true and worthy of veneration, what really obtains for all people blessing and salvation?

¹⁴ Brian E. Daley, SJ, *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*, Popular Patristics Series 18 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1998), 31–2. Works translated in this volume include homilies from John of Thessalonica, Theoteknos of Livias, Modestus of Jerusalem, three homilies by Andrew of Crete, two by St. Germanus of Constantinople, three by St. John of Damascus, and one by St. Theodore the Studite. In the footnotes below, the number following the name of the homily is the page number in Daley’s volume. Where appropriate, I have also provided the Greek from J. P. Migne’s *Patrologia Graecae* (=PG) volumes. Unless otherwise noted, for the Patristic homilies, the English translations are Daley’s.

Will we not receive the same sentence as he who hid the talent (Mt 25:25)?¹⁵

Here, St. John clearly anticipates and contravenes the charge that his assumption homily is some sort of mythologizing piece devoid of content that means to heap empty words upon the departed. The words in his homily about Mary are not only true but also exceedingly true (τὰ λίαν ἀληθῆ)! This challenges a contemporary way of reading the Greek Fathers as though their words are “seemingly not to be taken literally.”¹⁶ Rather, only

¹⁵ St. John of Damascus, Homily I, 188. Cf. *PG* 96, 705 C–D: ... πῶς ἡμεῖς τὰ λίαν ἀληθῆ καὶ σεβάσιμα, καὶ ὄντως ὄντα τοῖς πᾶσιν εὐλογίας ἀπάσης καὶ σωτηρίας πρόξενα, σιγῆς βυθοῖς τὰ τοῦ λόγου καλύψαντες, οὐ πολὺν ὀφλήσομεν γέλωτα.

¹⁶ Cf. Stephen J. Shoemaker’s introduction to his translation of St. Maximus the Confessor’s *The Life of the Virgin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 32. Shoemaker is here reflecting on the language of “ransom” and “redemptive sacrifice” of Christ. I agree with him that such terms are not “sufficient to capture the fullness of this mystery.” Human language fails before the ineffable, but “seemingly not to be taken literally” does not follow. I should say that Shoemaker’s translation work in this volume is excellent, offering a fluid read in idiomatic English for devotional reading on the one hand and solid methodology and abundant endnotes for academics on the other. This is the first appearance into English for this *vita*, which does not survive in its original Greek form, rather in Old Georgian. Since 1986, it has been also available in a French translation by Michel van Esbroeck. Shoemaker’s translation represents a breakthrough in Patristic Marian scholarship, even though Maximian authorship of this text is not established (for the time being, I am inclined to agree with Luigi Gambero’s case for later authorship; cf. “Biographies of Mary in Byzantine Literature,” *Marian Studies* 60 (2009): 38-42. Despite the value of Shoemaker’s translation, the author of this article agrees with a reviewer’s critique of his introduction:

When the introduction turns to the text itself, Shoemaker unfortunately tells us more of what the *Life of the Virgin* is *not* about than what it is. His overriding concern is to inoculate the reader from seeing in the text an early Byzantine prototype for the Latin doctrine of Mary as *Coredeptrix*. This entails a long

the highly artistic and symbolic language can convey the ineffable mysteries of the Virgin.¹⁷ Interestingly, Daley says, it seems that the ancient homilists were more inclined to use the exuberant classic prose hymn for the Virgin than for Christ and his mysteries.¹⁸

Concerning the body of the Virgin, the Fathers relate some interesting facts, for instance that she was only three cubits tall (about four-and-a-half feet).¹⁹ Concerning the mystery of the

excursus on the incompatibility of Anselmian atonement theory with Greek “incarnational” soteriology (24–32), which seems out of place in an introduction meant to orient new readers to the text. An account of the historical and theological background to the work itself in support of a more positive Mariological interpretation might have effectively excluded the “misinterpretation” Shoemaker is so keen to head off, without venturing into the realm of polemic (review by Jacob N. Van Sickle of Saint Louis University in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 21, 3 [Fall 2013]: 38-42).

I would add that this volume is an unusual place for a critique of Western Catholic doctrines of atonement and coredeemption (lumping St. Anselm, Jean Galot, and modern Mariologists into the mix) and how St. Maximus (if indeed this is his work) would not support such ideas. That seems like an impossible retrojection, especially since the quotes present in the *vita* are, the translator even admits (29), actually quite harmonious with such ideas and since the theology of Maximus the Confessor, especially in this period of conciliar history, emphasizes the role of the human in the work of deification. Cf. the explanation of Jean-Claude Larchet, *Questions À Thalassios*, Introduction and notes by Larchet, trad. François Vinel, Sources Chrétiennes, 529 (Paris : Éditions du Cerf , 2010), 54–6.

¹⁷ The impression that such a manner of speaking is only characteristic of Byzantine theology does not do justice to what one finds in the Latin medieval writers; one also sees such a manner of exalted praise in the West, as in the *Psalterium* cited below.

¹⁸ Daley, *On the Dormition*, 34.

¹⁹ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, Homily III, 138; St. John of Damascus, Homily I, 198.

Virgin's death, the Fathers emphasize that she would not have tasted the corruption of death.²⁰ The Fathers also report some sort of mystical transport of the apostles to her bedside before her death.²¹ Several of them recount the story of a certain Jewish man who tried to overthrow her funeral bier, but whose arms were severed when he laid them violently upon her body. After the apostles prayed for him and he repented, his arms were miraculously restored (the Damascene regards this detail as “a bit of spice”).²² Common also is the emphasis upon the spiritual excellence of the Virgin. The Damascene, for example, assigns to her a “twofold virginity—for she preserved the virginity of her soul no less than that of her body.”²³ St. Germanus in the voice of Christ, says, “Your soul, full of divine power, will see the glory of my Father. Your immaculate body will see the glory of his only Son. Your pure spirit will see the glory of the all-holy Spirit.”²⁴ It is clear that Christ grants her the glorified flesh,²⁵ making her the eschatological sign of the glorification of all the faithful. In words rather bold, John urges the Lord: “Come

²⁰ Theoteknos of Livias, 74; Modestus of Jerusalem, 90; St. John of Damascus, Homily I, 195. A possible exception to this, says Daley, is St. Germanus of Constantinople, Homily II, 169, though this reference seems mysterious when read with the presumption of continuity with his first homily, where he says that “both tombs really received bodies, yet neither of them was a workshop of decay” (157–8).

²¹ Cf. St. Germanus of Constantinople, Homily II, 174; John of Thessalonica, 55.

²² John of Thessalonica, 64 ff.; St. John of Damascus, Homily II, 217; cf. Daley, *On the Dormition*, 229.

²³ St. John of Damascus, Homily II, 190.

²⁴ St. Germanus of Constantinople, 171.

²⁵ St. John of Damascus, Homily III, 235.

down, come down, O Lord, and pay your mother the debt you owe her, the return she deserves for having nourished you.”²⁶

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the Mariology of this era is the dependence upon two-natures Christology that galvanizes the exaltation of Mary. The Fathers’ way of speaking about Mary resembles their manner of discourse about the humanity of Christ. For example, Modestus of Jerusalem says that “she contained the uncontainable one, she bore the fire of divinity without being singed.”²⁷ Andrew of Crete praises her, saying, “O holy one, holier than all the saints, supremely holy treasury of all that makes us holy! O woman who as one individual without division or dissolution, united humanity to God. O kingdom of those formed from earth, drawing your invincible power from the glory on high.”²⁸ One need not out of fear of God have an allergy to such formulations; they are fully harmonious with the conciliar Christology of the day. Monenergism would have asserted that there was only one activity in Christ: the divine. The Third Council of Constantinople (681), however, in establishing two activities in Christ, divine and human, implicitly pointed to Mary at the heart of divine-human synergy.

John of Damascus often turns aside in his encomia to integrate his praise of the Virgin with Christology. Notice how

²⁶ Ibid., 236.

²⁷ Modestus of Jerusalem, 93.

²⁸ St. Andrew of Crete, Homily III, 149. Cf. *PG* 97, 1108 B: Ἦ ἀγία, καὶ τῶν ἁγίων ἁγιωτέρα· καὶ πάσης ἁγιαστείας ὑπεράγιε θησαυρέ! Ἦ μερίς, ἢ ἀλύτως οὐ μεριστῶς ἐνώσασα Θεῷ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον! Ἦ βασιλεία τῶν ἀπὸ γῆς χοϊκῶν, ἐκ τῆς ἀνωτάτω δόξης τὸ κράτος ἔχουσα ἀπροσμάχητον!

conciliar language thoroughly penetrates his thought, a phenomenon that occurs often in the Greek Fathers of this era:

Then you, the Father's self-defining Word, dwelt in her without being limited, summoning the farthest reaches of our nature up to the endless heights of your incomprehensible divinity. Taking the first fruits [of our nature] from the holy, spotless and utterly pure blood²⁹ of the holy Virgin, you built around yourself a structure of flesh, livened by a rational and intelligent soul; you gave it individual existence in yourself, and became a human being without ceasing to be completely God, of the same essence as your Father.³⁰ Taking on our weakness, rather, in your unutterable mercy, you came forth from her a single Christ, a single Lord, one and the same who is both Son of God and Son of Man, at once completely God and completely human, the whole God and a whole human being, one composite individual from two complete natures, divinity and humanity, and [subsisting] in two complete natures, divinity and humanity.³¹ You are not simply God or merely human, but one who is both Son of God and God enfleshed, God and human at the same time; you have not undergone confusion or endured division, but you bear in yourself the natural qualities of two natures essentially distinct, yet untied without confusion and without division in your concrete existence:³² the created and the uncreated, the mortal and the immortal, the visible and the invisible, the circumscribed and the

²⁹ Regarding the conception of Christ from virginal blood, cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 2.9, PG 3, 648 A; Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguum* 5, PG 91, 1049 B; St. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 3.1; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (=STh.), III q.31 a.5.

³⁰ και γέγονας τέλειος ἄνθρωπος, οὐκ ἀποβαλὼν τὸ εἶναι τέλειος θεός, και τῷ σῶ Πατρὶ ὁμοῦσιος.

³¹ Here, with a strongly post-Cyrrillian flavor: μία ὑπόστασις σύνθετος, ἐκ δύο φύσεων τελείων, θεότητος τε και ἀνθρωπότητος, και ἐν δύο τελείαις φύσεσι, θεότητι τε και ἀνθρωπότητι.

³² Now, John employs the Chalcedonian adverbs: καθ' ὑπόστασιν ἀσυγχύτως ἅμα και ἀδιαιρέτως ἡνωμένων τὰς φυσικὰς ιδιότητας . . .

uncircumscribed,³³ divine will and human will, divine activity no less than human activity; two self-determining realities, divine and human at the same time; divine miracles and human passions—I refer to natural and blameless passions.³⁴

Notice how the Damascene in *De Fide Orthodoxa* unites Christology and Mariology to illumine the mystery of his two operations:

Moreover, just as He received in His birth of a virgin superessential essence, so also He revealed His human energy in a superhuman way, walking with earthly feet on unstable water, not by turning the water into earth, but by causing it in the superabundant power of His divinity not to flow away nor yield beneath the weight of material feet. For not in a merely human way did He do human things: for He was not only man, but also God, and so even His sufferings brought life and salvation: nor yet did He energize as God, strictly after the manner of God, for He was not only God, but also man, and so it was by touch and word and such like that He worked miracles.³⁵

³³ Here in the language of circumscription (τὸ περιγραπτὸν καὶ τὸ ἀπερίγραπτον) one can see John's language of the Christ-icon, that of Christ's ability to be depicted, a controversy taken up by Second Nicaea in 787.

³⁴ St. John of Damascus, Homily I, 185–6 (PG 96, 704 A–C). Cf. Homily II, 209; Modestus of Jerusalem, 96; St. Andrew of Crete, Homily I, 112; St. Germanus of Constantinople, Homily II, 170.

³⁵ St. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 3.15. St. Maximus the Confessor also made reference to the virgin birth in a very similar passage, cf. *Amb.* 5, PG 91, 1049 B–C. John was likely drawing directly from Maximus, through Dionysius the Areopagite who connects the Virgin birth and walking on water.

“Superior himself to the human condition he does the work of a man. A proof of this is that a virgin supernaturally bore him and that flowing water, bearing the weight of his corporal, earthly feet, did not yield, but,

In other words, Jesus' walking on water demonstrates his divine and human operations in a theandric mode of existence,³⁶ and it's not as though he walked on the water as God alone; notice that John says "with earthly feet." This follows the same pattern as Maximus's *Ambiguum* 5, which begins with Virgin birth and moves to the walking on water. Where once the mystery of the Virgin birth had become the antidote to Docetism, now the same becomes proof of the two-in-oneness of Christ's operations. Our Lady herself is a stumbling block for the heterodox, since "in her case mutually contradictory things can truly come together. For she herself is both virgin and mother, innovating nature by a coincidence of opposites, since virginity and childbearing are opposites, and no one would have

rather, held him up with supernatural power" (*Letter 4 to Gaius the monk*, PG 3, 1072 B; this is the very letter that became the basis for Maximus's *Ambiguum* 5).

"That he undertook to be a man is, for us, entirely mysterious. We have no way of understanding how, in a fashion at variance with nature, he was formed from a virgin's blood. We do not understand how with dry feet and with his body's solid weight he walked on the unstable surface of the water. And we do not understand whatever else has to do with the supernatural nature of Jesus" (*Divine Names* 2.9, PG 3, 648 A). Translations from *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). Similarly, cf. Pope St. Leo the Great, *Tome to Flavian*, trans. William Bright, in *Christology of the Latter Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 365.

³⁶ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, III q.19 a.1 ad 1.

been able to imagine their natural combination. Therefore, the Virgin is truly ‘Theotokos.’”³⁷

Returning to the Assumption homilies, Andrew invokes priestly and sacrificial imagery to describe her body: “The body which became the altar of propitiation for us all he took from her body, and it became a temple not made by hands, lordly and rich in salvation, sharing in all our natural and spiritual activity except sin alone.”³⁸ Here, and in similar such constructions, one can detect a tangible movement toward the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.³⁹ Andrew adds that “she is the place where our sins are expiated through the mystery of Jesus’ own initiation” and that the “bill of liberation” he wrote to save us from our sins was the body he took from the Virgin.⁴⁰

The Damascene shows how the faithful might please their mother. If one wants to please Our Lady, the best approach is to become like her through imitation of her qualities and avoiding what she rejects: “She is herself a virgin, and a lover of virgins;

³⁷ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Amb. 5*, from *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 1, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 42–45 (PG 91, 1052 D–1053 A). It is perhaps no surprise, then, that St. Pope Martin I, who was martyred during the monothelite controversy, is credited for defining at the Lateran Council (and in the presence of Maximus, no less) the dogma of the perpetual virginity: that the ever-Virgin was virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ (cf. Denz. 256, Lateran Council of 649, Can. 3).

³⁸ St. Andrew of Crete, Homily I, 113.

³⁹ Cf. Fr. Peter M. Fehlner, FI, “The Predestination of the Virgin Mother and Her Immaculate Conception,” in *Mariology: A Guide for Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, and Consecrated Persons*, ed. Mark I. Miravalle (Goleta, CA.: Seat of Wisdom Books, Queenship, 2007), 237 ff.

⁴⁰ St. Andrew of Crete, Homily III, 148.

she is herself pure, and a lover of the pure. If we consecrate her memory along with our own bodies, we will receive her grace to dwell within us.”⁴¹ She is, therefore, the exemplar for Christian holiness.

As the doctrine of the divinization of man flourished during this period, so did the understanding of Mary’s role in divinization. Andrew says, “She, she alone has been chosen for the renewal of our nature, beyond nature’s powers; she alone subjected herself fully to the one who formed all nature from nothing.”⁴² Like Christ himself, she transforms not only man, but also the whole created order: “All things are made holy by your myrrh-like fragrance.”⁴³ Elsewhere, he speaks of her role in enlightenment, saying, “By her radiance, we are illuminated with the God who is, before the morning star.”⁴⁴ Regarding the eminent sanctity of Mary’s body, he adds:

The body of the Mother of God, then, is a source of life [for us], because it received into itself the whole life-giving fullness of the Godhead; it is the precious bridal chamber of virginity, the heaven above us, the earth that brings forth God, the first-fruits of Adam’s mass made divine in Christ, exact image of [creation’s] original beauty, divinely confirmed guardian of God’s unspeakable judgments, dwelling-place of human perfection, spiritual book of God’s words of redemption, inexplicable depth of the endless “fullness that fills all things” (Eph 4:10), impregnable fortress of our hidden hopes, treasury of a purity beyond our understanding, royal robe of the Word who is beyond all beginnings and who became a human being, earthly palace of the heavenly king,

⁴¹ St. John of Damascus, Homily II, 222–3.

⁴² St. Andrew of Crete, Homily III, 140.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁴ St. Andrew of Crete, Homily II, 132–3.

celebrated workshop for God's dealings with us, utterly suitable material for the divine embodiment, divine and perfect clay for the sculptor of all creation—from whom he who is above all substance came to share, wholly and truly, in our substance, and took on a substance like ours, for our sake.⁴⁵

St. Germanus, too, explores the eternal consequence of the Virgin for humanity:

For if you had not gone before us, no one would ever become perfectly spiritual (*πνευματικός*), no one would worship God in the Spirit (Jn 4:24). No one is filled with the knowledge of God except through you, all-holy One; no one is saved but through you, Mother of God, no one is freed of danger but through you, Virgin Mother; no one is redeemed but through you, Mother of God; no one ever receives mercy gratuitously except through you who have received God.⁴⁶

It is thus that we return to our thesis, as we see the indispensability of the Virgin in the glorification of mankind. She is more than the creature of the Eternal Son; were it not for her, Christ would not have this new and salvific mode of existence. Hear Andrew's reverence before the body of Our Lady: "What unguents shall anoint your body—that body so fragrant, so spotless, so full of goodness, so rich in forgiveness, so flowing with incorruptible power; that body from which we draw divine life, in which we find our perfection, through which we receive our salvation?"⁴⁷ Because she became the one who

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁶ St. Germanus of Constantinople, Homily I, 160–1.

⁴⁷ St. Andrew of Crete, Homily III, 143.

gives birth to beauty (ή καλλιτόκος),⁴⁸ Mary's beauty makes her children divine.

III. Marian Psalter of Bonaventure and the *Mater pulchrae dilectionis*

Fyodor Dostoevsky often takes up the question of beauty. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, someone visited the soul of the author's "hero," the saintly Alyosha, when he entered into his rapture over the beauty of the night sky and the natural world. Alyosha "longed to forgive every one and for everything, and to beg forgiveness. Oh, not for himself but for all men, for all and for everything."⁴⁹ Elsewhere, in Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, we find Prince Myshkin, who seemed to believe that beauty would save the world.⁵⁰ The prince's faults aside, it would seem that Dostoevsky shared such a hope.

⁴⁸ Cf. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Recta Fide Ad Reginas* (PG 76, 1213 C): ὄν χθές ἀχράντοις λοχείαις Σωτήρα ἡμῶν ἢ ζωοτόκος, ἢ καλλιτόκος, ἢ μεγαλοτόκος, ἢ φασσφόρος, ἢ ἐλπιδοφόρος, ἢ Θεοτόκος, ἢ ξενοτόκος, ἢ παρθενομήτωρ ὄδινε Μαρία.

⁴⁹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Heritage Press, 1949), 279–80. Though Alyosha is shortly from this point to leave the monastery he loves, De Lubac remarks that Alyosha's ecstasy is "not an ending. ... it brings him strength. It is a viaticum for his journey. ... The mysticism of *The Brothers Karamazov* is the mysticism of the Resurrection. It is eschatological." *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Anne Englund Nash and Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 390.

⁵⁰ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. David Magarshack (New York: Penguin Classics, 1955), 394.

The author of the *Psalterium Beatae Mariae Virginis*⁵¹ would have given an answer for Myshkin: Our Lady's is a beauty that saves: "The odor of life comes forth from her: and all salvation springs out of her heart" (ps. 79).⁵² Attributed to St. Bonaventure, the *Psalterium* presents a flourishing of medieval praise to the Virgin. In many ways, the Marian psalter is similar in its rhetorical artistry to the Akathist Hymn of the Byzantine East.⁵³ From the beginning of this psalter, the beauty of the Virgin is placed in its cosmological order: "By the beauty of your body you surpass all women; by the excellence of your sanctity you surpass all angels and archangels" (ps. 1).⁵⁴

Here one finds quite a glorious exploration of the splendor of Mary's form, especially the outward appearance of inner

⁵¹ For an English translation of the Marian psalter, cf. St. Bonaventure, *The Mirror of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Psalter of Our Lady*, trans. Sr. Mary Emmanuel, OSB (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1932). References to the psalms will be made in the text, and the Latin will be supplied in the footnotes.

⁵² *Odor vitae de illa progreditur: et omnis salus de corde illius scaturizat.*

⁵³ It is beyond the scope of this present paper to make a comparison between these two great encomia for the Virgin-Mother. Thematic similarities will immediately present themselves to any reader familiar with the Akathist. For a Greek-English version of the Akathist, cf. *The Service of the Akathist Hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos*, trans. Hieromonk Seraphim Dedes (Pittsburgh: Clergy Syndesmos, 2000). Those more familiar with Greek can easily access these prayers through downloadable apps for Apple or Windows devices (<http://psaltiki.gr/apps/orthodox>). For more on the theological depth of the Akathist and the Small Paraklesis, see Virginia M. Kimball, "The Language of Mediation in Eastern Liturgical Prayer," *Marian Studies* 52 (2001): 183–218.

⁵⁴ *Universas enim feminas vincis pulchritudine carnis: superas angelos et archangelos excellentia sanctitatis.*

realities.⁵⁵ The psalmist looks to the body of Our Lady, often magnifying her head,⁵⁶ face,⁵⁷ lips,⁵⁸ eyes,⁵⁹ ears,⁶⁰ hands,⁶¹ arms,⁶² feet,⁶³ womb,⁶⁴ and breasts.⁶⁵ Should the Virgin turn

⁵⁵ Cf. Johann G. Roten, SM, “Mary and the Way of Beauty,” *Marian Studies* 49 (1998): 116. He writes, “Beauty can also be related to harmony and proportion; hence, for Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, the concept of beauty becomes splendor of form. Form refers to the shape and the size of material reality; it is the outward appearance of inner reality, also called the sensible form. There is beauty in sensible form, but greater beauty still in inward form, since it enlightens the mind and constitutes the nature of a being. Where the essence of a being or thing manifests itself in outward appearance, there is beauty. The shining light of its essence has to overcome the opacity of its material density in order to make a thing beautiful.”

⁵⁶ Cf. pss. 23, 64, 109.

⁵⁷ Cf. pss. 2, 5, 7, 10, 19, 22, 25, 26, 31, 85, 88, 95, 99, 101, 104, 112, 113, 118H, 124–126, 128, 140, 142. The face of Mary turns to supplicants with mercy.

⁵⁸ Cf. pss. 64, 106, 118H, 126. From her lips come refreshing words of mercy and a longed-for voice.

⁵⁹ Cf. pss. 10, 12, 22, 95, 120, 138. The eyes of Mary look with mercy.

⁶⁰ Cf. pss. 5, 28, 85, 129, 142. The ears of Mary hearken to prayer.

⁶¹ Cf. pss. 2, 10, 21, 22, 27–30, 35, 54, 56, 58, 70, 73, 91, 98, 104, 108, 113, 118C, 124, 143; fingers, cf. pss. 56, 58. The hand of Mary is often symbolic of her power.

⁶² Cf. pss. 10, 35, 54–56, 78, 97. Similar to the hand, the arm often occurs in the context of victory over enemies.

⁶³ Cf. pss. 14, 23, 51, 67, 105, 119. Here, too, the feet are a sign of a victorious conqueror: she treads upon enemies.

⁶⁴ Cf. pss. 6, 15, 18, 34, 48, 50, 63, 93, 115, 128, 131. Unsurprisingly, the womb of Mary is often connected poetically with its fruit, Jesus.

⁶⁵ Cf. pss. 15, 17, 22, 31, 32, 58.

away her face, all hope would be lost: “To them whom you shall help, O Lady, will be the refreshment of peace: and they from whom you turnest away your face shall have no hope of salvation” (ps. 99).⁶⁶ With words that would make many readers blush, the psalmist praises the body of the Virgin: “Blessed be your breasts, by which you hast nourished the Savior with deific milk” (ps. 15).⁶⁷ Such milk refreshes the souls of all her children, as the psalmist goes further: “Give to us, O Lady, the grace of your breasts: from the dropping milk of your sweetness refresh the inmost souls of your children” (ps. 17).⁶⁸ Clearly, the “deific milk” of Our Lady is a metaphor for grace for the psalmist. Elsewhere, “Holy, chaste, and flowering are your breasts: which blossomed into the flower of eternal greenness” (ps. 31).⁶⁹

In a passage with a clear dependence upon Sirach (Vulgate), the psalmist says that Our Lady possesses a most desirable and fecund beauty that bears fruit for those who praise her. He writes:

Save me, O Mother of fair love: fount of clemency and sweetness of piety.

You alone makest the circuit of the earth: that you mayst help those that call upon you.

Beautiful are your ways: and your paths are peaceful.

⁶⁶ *Quibus auxiliata fueris Domina erit refrigerium pacis: et a quibus auerteris vultum tuum, non erit eis spes ad salutem.*

⁶⁷ *Benedicta sint mundissima ubera tua: quibus lacte deifico Salvatorem Iesum enutristi.*

⁶⁸ *Stilla nobis Domina gratiam uberum tuorum: et ex te mananti lacte dulcedinus tuae refice esuriem nostram.*

⁶⁹ *Sancta, casta, et florida viscera tua: quae florem viriditatis perpetuae conceperunt.*

In you shine forth the beauty of chastity, the light of justice, and the splendor of truth.

You art clothed with the sunrays as with a vesture: resplendent with a shining twelve-starred crown (ps. 11).⁷⁰

Since the ways (*viae*) of Mary are beautiful, they instruct the faithful. In her is a model for imitation. Her beauty leads to God: “Adore ye her in her beauty: glorify the Maker of her beauty” (ps. 74).⁷¹ This beauty is not for the gratification of sense, but for the strengthening of the Christian life, typified in Mary’s virtues: “Her beauty outshines the sun and the moon: she is adorned with the ornaments of virtues” (ps. 77).⁷²

The psalmist does not neglect to praise the spiritual reality of Mary’s humanity, as is evident in the sacrificial language of psalm 27: “The sanctuary which your hands have established: is the holy temple of your body. Your conscience is pure and undefiled: a place of propitiation and the holy dwelling of God.”⁷³ Even though it has been observed how the psalmist praises the body of the Virgin, yet holier, it seems, is her soul:

⁷⁰ *Salvum me fac Mater pulchrae dilectionis: fons clementiae, et dulcor pietatis. Girum terrae sola circuis: ut subvenias invocantibus te. Pulchrae sunt viae tuae: et semitae tuae pacificae. In te refulget species castitatis: lumen iustitiae et splendor veritatis. Amicta solari lumine sicut vestimento: duodecim stellarum corona rutilas radianti.*

⁷¹ *Adorate illam in decore illius: glorificate opificem pulchritudinus illius.*

⁷² *Pulchritudo eius vincit solem et lunam: compositio decoris eius adornamenta virtutum.*

⁷³ *Santuarium quod firmaverunt manus tuae: est sanctum templum corporis tui gloriosi. Conscientia tua munda et immaculata: est locus propitiationis et habitaculum sanctum Dei.* The 1642 manuscript reads *manus Dei* instead of the *manus tuae* above.

“Blessed be your holy body: blessed be your *most holy* soul” (ps. 122).⁷⁴ As the sacred authors of the Holy Scriptures do, the psalmist refers to the heart of Mary as though to her soul; it is the center of her love and mercy.⁷⁵ It is here in the heart that the magnificence of Mary most greatly shines.

Furthermore, the psalmist boldly confesses his holy *eros* for the virtue of Mary. For example, he writes, “Turn not away your face from me: for from my youth up I have greatly desired (*concupivi*) your beauty and your grace” (ps. 26).⁷⁶ In a way, this is an unending desire (*concupiscam aeternum*): “I will long forever to praise you, O Lady: when you shall have taught me your justifications” (ps. 118J).⁷⁷ Indeed, this holy desire the faithful are given to share with the Eternal Son. When the psalmist recounts the annunciation, he accents Our Lady’s choice-worthiness:

The God of gods hath spoken to Mary: by Gabriel, his messenger, saying:

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you: by you the salvation of the world is repaired.

The Son of the Most High hath greatly desired (*concupivit*) your beauty and your comeliness.

⁷⁴ My emphasis. *Benedicta sit corpus tuum sanctum: benedicta sit anima tua sanctissima.*

⁷⁵ Cf. pss. 1, 4, 8, 18, 65, 79, 98, 105, 140.

⁷⁶ *Ne avertas faciem tuam à me: quia speciem et decorem tuum à iuventute mea concupivi. Cf. psalm 118B: “Behold I have coveted your chastity from my youth up: in your mercy strengthen me” (Ecce concupii castimoniam tuam à iuventute mea: in misericordia tua confirma me).*

⁷⁷ *Concupiscam in aeternum laudare te Domina: cum docueris me iustificationes tuas.*

Adorn your bridal chamber, O Daughter of Sion: prepare to meet your God.

You shall conceive by the Holy Ghost: who will make your delivery virginal and joyful (psalm 49).⁷⁸

She is the strength of all religious vocations, according to the psalmist: “O ye religious and cloistered souls, hope in her: confide in her, ye priests and seculars. Take delight in her praises: and she will grant the petitions of your heart” (ps. 36).⁷⁹ Elsewhere, the psalmist highlights her unique role in the lives of religious:

Honor her, O all ye religious: for she is your helper and your special advocate. Be you our refreshment, glorious Mother of Christ: for you art the admirable foundation of the religious life (ps. 17).⁸⁰

Her beauty is viaticum for the departing soul: “May your gracious countenance appear to me in my end: may the beauty of your face rejoice my spirit in its going forth” (psalm 88).⁸¹ Thus, she is the safeguard of a holy death, delivering believers

⁷⁸ *Deus Deorum Mariae locutus est: per Gabriel nuntium suum dicentem. Ave gratia plena, Dominus tecum: per te salus mundi perditam reparatur. Speciem tuam et decorem tuum: altissimi Filius concupivit. Adorna thalamum tuum filia Sion: praepara te in occursum Dei tui. Per Spiritum enim sanctum concipies: qui tuum partum faciet virgineum et iucundum.*

⁷⁹ *Sperate in illa Religiosi et Claustales: confidite in illam Clerici et Saeculares. Delectamini in laudibus illius: et exaudiet petitiones cordis vestri.*

⁸⁰ *Religiosi omnes honorate illam: quia ipsa est adiutrix, et vestra specialis advocata. Esto refugium nostrum, gloriosa Mater Christi: quia tu es totius religionis mirabile firmamentum.*

⁸¹ *Gratiosus vultus tuus mihi appareat in extremis: formositas faciei tuae laetificet egredientem spiritum meum.*

from eternal death and conducting them even beyond fear to the harbor of eternal life at the day of death.⁸²

On the one hand, the project to write a psalter for Our Lady that parallels the book of Psalms seems quite audacious. On the other, the psalmist seems to reason that the efficacy of Mary's causality of grace in the soul is just as certain as God's. If God were to have mercy, the sinner would receive grace. If Mary were to have mercy, the sinner would receive grace. That does not make Mary equal to God in the eyes of the psalmist. She has a singularity among humans that elevates her to a super-eminent dignity. Like God, she does not fail to procure mercy. The *Akathist* expresses this as well: "Rejoice, who plead till the just Judge surrenders; rejoice, forgiveness for many offenders."⁸³ In words that evoke the love of John Paul II for Our Lady, the psalmist writes, "I am all thine, O Lady; save me: for your praises were desirable to me in the time of my pilgrimage" (ps. 118E).⁸⁴

IV. John Paul II, Virginal Flesh, and the Religious Life

Totus tuus—Pope St. John Paul II gave his pontificate entirely to the Virgin Mary, and his papacy is saturated with rich Marian reflections. One wonders, if this is the case, how it is that

⁸² The theme of Marian intercession at the time of death pervades the *Psalterium*. Cf. pss. 3, 19, 29, 44, 67, 76, 83, 103, 110, 114, 118A, 129.

⁸³ Third Stanza, 53. Χαῖρε, Κριτοῦ δικαίου δύσωπησις· χαῖρε, πολλῶν πταιόντων συγχώρησις.

⁸⁴ *Tuus totus ego sum, Domina, salvum me fac: quoniam desiderabiles erant laudes tuae in tempore peregrinationis meae.*

his theology-of-the-body audiences⁸⁵ make so few explicit references to the Blessed Virgin, who is the only human person intrinsically related to the corporality of the Eternal Son,⁸⁶ yet Eve is a focal point throughout the audiences. It is remarkable, indeed, that on such a topic where so much could be said, John Paul II *seemed* to have said so little; after all, he was in no wise known for laconic brevity. Yet, what he *has* said is remarkably significant. In this section, particular attention must be paid to one Mariologically rich general audience in which he explicitly treats of the Virgin Mother in relation to the two primary mysteries of the faith: the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. After treating this audience, we will consider some more general aspects of the theology-of-the-body (TOB) corpus for Mariology.

The audience of March 24, 1982, marked a noteworthy Mariological “moment” in the papacy of John Paul II.⁸⁷ He

⁸⁵ The theology-of-the-body meditations were given during Pope John Paul II’s Wednesday audiences from Sept. 5, 1979, to Nov. 28, 1984. Translations of John Paul II’s theology-of-the-body audiences (=TOB) are taken from *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Maria Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006). It is noteworthy that John Paul II survived an assassination attempt nearly halfway into the audiences, which led, in his words upon resuming the audiences, to “a rather long pause” (TOB 64:1). He attributed his survival to Our Lady’s having guided the bullet safely through his body. In a certain sense, the final 24 years of his papacy—inclusive of these latter audiences early in the same papacy—are a Marian gift to the world.

⁸⁶ Cf. John F. Murphy, “Origin and Nature of Marian Cult,” in *Mariology*, ed. Juniper Carol, vol. 3, 10–11, quoted by Arthur Burton Calkins in *Totus Tuus: John Paul II’s Program of Marian Consecration and Entrustment* (Libertyville, IL: Academy of the Immaculate, 1992), 167.

⁸⁷ Just over seven weeks later, there would be another: his consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

begins that audience by taking up the topic of virginity for the sake of the kingdom. Celibacy and virginity are a “charismatic sign” that in heaven there will be no husband or wife. Living the celibate life “points out the eschatological ‘virginity’ of the risen man, in which, I would say, the absolute and eternal spousal meaning of the glorified body will be revealed in union with God himself.”⁸⁸

From these initial observations, John Paul turns to the virginal three: Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.⁸⁹ He says that Our Lady’s question to the angel professes her virginity,⁹⁰ and that to her “virginal motherhood corresponded the virginal mystery of Joseph.” John Paul explains that the descent of Jesus from David transcends Israel’s expectations that his descent be according to the flesh, saying, “Only Mary and Joseph, who lived the mystery of his birth, became the first witnesses of a fruitfulness different from that of the flesh, that is, the fruitfulness of the Spirit. ‘What is begotten in her comes from the Holy Spirit.’”⁹¹

These mysteries, however, would remain hidden until the revelation recorded by the evangelists, the pope says. In this

⁸⁸ TOB 75:1.

⁸⁹ TOB 75:2: On the virginity of Christ himself, cf. TOB 81:4.

⁹⁰ Cf. Lk. 1:34: Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω; Lit: “How will this be, since I do not know man?” Whether Mary was intending to remain a virgin even into her marriage with Joseph has been a topic of constant debate. If, indeed, she had planned to enter into conjugal relations with St. Joseph, it is difficult, to be sure, to make sense of her question here, especially since the angel addresses her in the future tense (Lk 1:31: καὶ ἰδοὺ συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ) and she had to have known of her own betrothal.

⁹¹ TOB 75:2.

way, the hidden life of Jesus in the Holy Family thus becomes a profound image of the religious life—hidden, because mystery. Believers sometimes think of the hidden life as somewhat antithetical to the public life, as though there were a movement from not having something to having something, from the solitude of home life to the fulfillment of social living.⁹² Quite the contrary! When it comes to mystery, what is hidden is usually very deep. John Paul II continues, concerning the Trinitarian and Christological dimensions of the virgin marriage:

The marriage of Mary with Joseph (in which the Church honors Joseph as Mary's spouse and Mary as his spouse) *conceals within itself*, at the same time, *the mystery* of the perfect communion of persons, of Man and Woman in the conjugal covenant and at the same time the mystery of this *singular 'contenance for the kingdom of heaven'*: a continence that served the most perfect '*fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit*' in the history of salvation. Indeed, it was in some way the absolute fullness of that spiritual fruitfulness, because precisely in the Nazarene conditions of Mary and Joseph's covenant in marriage and continence, the gift of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word was realized: the Son of God, consubstantial with the Father, was conceived and born as a Man from the Virgin Mary. The grace of the hypostatic union is connected, I would say, precisely with this absolute fullness of supernatural fruitfulness, fruitfulness in the Holy Spirit, shared by a human creature, Mary, in the order of "contenance for the kingdom of heaven." Mary's divine motherhood is also in some way a superabundant revelation of that fruitfulness in the Holy Spirit to which man submits his spirit when he

⁹² For a similar anthropocentric difficulty for the mind, consider the doctrine of creation. When speaking of *creation ex nihilo*, one speaks rather paradoxically. There cannot truly be something from nothing. What one means, of course, is that God alone bestows being (cf. Jn. 1:1 ff.).

freely chooses continence “in the body,” specifically, continence “for the kingdom of heaven.”⁹³

Interestingly, John Paul II takes up the marriage of Mary and Joseph which hides in itself (and therefore reveals) the mystery of the “perfect communion of persons.” This he relates directly to “man and woman in the conjugal covenant” and the mysterious fecundity of the continence of the Holy Family in the economy of salvation. Those in the religious life, who practice “continence for the kingdom of heaven,” can find, according to the Pope, an archetype in the Holy Family,⁹⁴ the preeminent example of the religious community. Because they are a “perfect communion of persons,” they in a particular way are an image of the Holy Trinity—it is precisely in the locus of the interpersonal and fruitfully chaste love of Mary and Joseph that the Eternal Word can become flesh.

John Paul explicitly connects the divine motherhood with the supernatural fruitfulness that flows from the hypostatic union. Mary is unique among all creatures in that she is related to the Eternal Son by hypostatic order. Unfathomably glorious is Mary’s dignity, she who is uniquely related as a creature to the hypostasis of the Son. One of John Paul’s predecessors, Pope Pius IX, in his bull that defined the Immaculate Conception, said that Mary’s holiness was so great “no greater than hers can be

⁹³ TOB 75:3.

⁹⁴ Cf. Mt. 19:10–12, which is to be considered in the broader context of the pericope, namely, following the Lord’s teaching concerning marriage (19:3-9). Later in the same chapter, Jesus promises that “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (19:29). If that promise is for his apostles, how much more for his most perfect disciples Mary and Joseph?

conceived” and “no mind but the mind of God can measure it.”⁹⁵ Hugon similarly states that the divine maternity is of a higher order than that of adoptive sonship in which believers participate. “This latter produces only a spiritual and mystic relationship, whereas the maternity of the Blessed Virgin establishes a relationship of nature, a relationship of consanguinity with Jesus Christ and one of affinity with the entire Trinity.” Further, he says that while adoptive sonship produces no obligation on the part of God, the divine maternity grants to Mary “dominion and power over Him” by the natural order.⁹⁶

Such profound subordination on the part of the Son to the Mother calls to mind spousal imagery invoked by St. Paul in Ephesians: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”⁹⁷ The mutual subordination of which Paul speaks here is meant to convoke the image of the Christ-Church relationship.

⁹⁵ Pope Pius IX, Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*: “ab initio et ante saecula unigenito filio suo Matrem, ex quo caro factus in beata temporum plenitudine nasceretur elegit atque ordinavit, tantoque prae creaturis universis est prosecutus amore, ut it illa una sibi propensissima voluntate complacuerit. Quapropter illam longe ante omnes angelicos Spiritus, cunctosque Sanctos caelestium omnium charismatum copia de thesauro Divinitatis deprompta ita mirifice cumulavit ut ipsa an omni prorsus peccati labe semper libera ac tota pulchra et perfecta eam innocentiae et sanctitatis plenitudinem prae se ferret, qua maior sub Deo nullatenus intelligitur, et quam praeter Deum nemo assequi cogitando potest.” Quoted in Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP, *The Mother of the Savior and Our Interior Life*, trans. Bernard J. Kelly, CSSp (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1993), 29, 67–8.

⁹⁶ Edouard Hugon, OP, *Marie, pleine de grâce*, 5th ed. (Paris: Lethielleux, 1926), 63, cited in Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Savior*, 31.

⁹⁷ Paul, here, is clearly addressing both male and female spouses, as indicated by the masculine gender at the beginning of this exhortation. *ὅποτασσομένοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ* (Eph. 5:21).

Mysteriously, this can lead one back to Our Lady, according to Cyril of Alexandria: “Let us praise with songs of joy Mary ever virgin, who herself is clearly the holy Church, together with her Son and most chaste spouse.”⁹⁸ Thus, in a way, that mystery that is Christ and Church in Ephesians is a mystery of Christ and Mary. Clearly, one can see how the two mutually subordinated themselves to each other.

As stated above, the virginal mystery of Mary and Joseph was hidden until the era of the Church and recordation by the evangelist. Thus, the inner life of the Holy Family bore fruit for the whole world, and especially for the Church and the hierarchy Jesus would institute. The virginal continence of the Holy Family would become the foundation of Christ’s active ministry.

When Christ spoke about those who “made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12), the disciples were able to understand it only on the basis of his personal example. Such continence must have impressed itself on their consciousness as a particular trait of likeness to Christ, who had himself remained celibate “for the kingdom of heaven.”⁹⁹

The postmodern West tends to idealize a limited family size, and the idea of forfeiting progeny has some sort of social appeal, albeit for various secular reasons. Throughout the biblical era, however, abundance of children was a sign of divine favor. Thus, celibacy for the sake of the kingdom would have struck

⁹⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, Hom. 4 (PG 77, 996 C): ὑμνοῦντας τὴν ἀειπάρθενον Μαρίαν, δηλονότι τὴν ἁγίαν Ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ τὸν ταύτης Υἱὸν, καὶ νυμφίον ἄσπιλον; quoted in Hugo Rahner, SJ, *Our Lady and the Church*, trans. Sebastian Bullough, OP (Bethesda, MD: Zacchaeus Press, 2004), 19–20.

⁹⁹ TOB 75:4.

the apostles with its full radical force. This principle lived out was manifest *in carni* before their very eyes. John Paul says, “The detachment from the tradition of the Old Covenant, in which marriage and procreative fruitfulness ‘in the body’ were a religiously privileged condition, must have been brought about above all on the basis of the example of Christ himself.”¹⁰⁰ For John Paul II, the eternal meaning of the body is manifested through virginity.¹⁰¹

Further supporting the thesis that the continence of the Holy Family represents an archetype of religious life and an entrance of sorts into the mystery of the Holy Trinity are John Paul II’s reflections in *Vita consecrata*. Therein he writes, “By practicing the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension which marks the whole of Christian life.”¹⁰² That is very similar to his reflection of March 24, 1982.¹⁰³ In this section of *Vita consecrata*, he roots the evangelical counsels in the Trinitarian life, such that “the consecrated life thus becomes a confession and a sign of the Trinity, whose mystery is held up to the Church as the model and source of every form of Christian life,”¹⁰⁴ and whose fraternal life “is put forward as an eloquent witness to the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ TOB 71:6.

¹⁰² *Vita consecrata*, 21: “Iis in exsequendis vivit consecrata persona vehementiore quadam vi trinitariam et christologicam naturam qua universa signatur christiana vita.”

¹⁰³ Cf. TOB 75:3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. “Fit igitur confessio simul et Trinitatis declaratio, cuius mysterium Ecclesiae indicatur veluti exemplar atque omnis vitae christianae formae origo.”

Trinity.”¹⁰⁵ Here, too, Mary is exalted as a model of the religious life: “Mary in fact is the *sublime example of perfect consecration*, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him.”¹⁰⁶

As Michael Waldstein points out, the “main thesis” of the theology of the body is that “the body was created as a sacramental sign of Trinitarian love.”¹⁰⁷ John Paul II writes, “Man appears in the visible world as the highest expression of the divine gift, because he bears within himself the inner dimension of the gift. And with it he carries into the world his particular likeness to God, with which he transcends and also rules his ‘visibility’ in the world, his bodiliness, his masculinity or femininity, his nakedness.”¹⁰⁸ As if in response to the postmodern tension that puts woman in opposition to her nature, John Paul II averred:

The whole exterior constitution of woman’s body, its particular look, the qualities that stand, with the power of a perennial attraction, at the beginning of the “knowledge” about which Genesis 4:1–2 speaks (“Adam united himself with Eve”), are in strict union with motherhood. With the simplicity characteristic of it, the Bible (and the liturgy following it) honors and praises throughout the centuries “the womb that bore you and the breasts from which you sucked milk” (Lk 11:27). These

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. “... eloquens exhibetur Trinitatis confessio.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 28. “*Maria namque perfectae consecrationis excelsum exemplar est, tota in sua ad Deum pertinendi condicione atque deditio.*” Regarding John Paul II’s notion of Mary’s spousal relation to God, see Robert Fastiggi, “The Use of the *Sensus Plenior* in the Mariology of John Paul II,” *Marian Studies* 61 (2010): 90–1.

¹⁰⁷ See in particular, in Waldstein’s forthcoming book, *Glory of the Logos in the Flesh*, the chapter on John Paul’s Trinitarian Personalism.

¹⁰⁸ TOB 19:3.

words are a eulogy of motherhood, of femininity, of the feminine body in its typical expression of creative love.¹⁰⁹

In a particular way, one could say, the supreme dignity of the Virgin bears this dimension of gift inwardly to an ineffable degree of glory. Bodily, she is the highest manifestation of gift next to that of her Son. She is the sign prophesied in Isaiah, that a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son. Her existence is prophetic fulfillment, divine fidelity, salvation for the world. Most especially, the sacramentality of the Virgin is most evident in the mysteries of the life of her Son, as, for example, when she is making haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth, or when she receives the gift-bearing magi come to honor her Son, or when she is standing at the foot of the Cross. She exists as chaste gift to the Most High and gift from the Most High: ever-Virgin, Mother of God, Mother of Mercy.

All human beings are her children by merit of the Lord's words from the cross, and believers are especially hers by virtue of the adoption of sonship given in baptism. Closer than Mary is with any of us, she is closer to her divine Son by virtue of the hypostatic order and the dignity of the divine maternity, which surpasses that of spiritual maternity in a way beyond conception. Thus, she is primarily her Son's and he hers. Biblical Mariology has traditionally understood the Song of Songs allegorically as a love song between Jesus and Mary. Similarly, one could appropriate John Paul II's reflections for Mariology. On this theme he writes, "The 'sister bride' is for the man the master of her own mystery as a 'garden closed' and a 'fountain sealed.' The 'language of the body' reread in the truth goes hand in hand

¹⁰⁹ TOB 21:5.

with the discovery of the inner inviolability of the person.”¹¹⁰

One can readily see how Christ (like Solomon, the son of David), relates to his queen as “master of her mystery.” She is his “garden closed” and “fountain sealed.”

Regarding the self-gift of spouses within the marriage of Mary and Joseph, Dr. Gloria Dodd writes:

Mary and Joseph must have both rejoiced to have found a spouse willing to receive and accept the other as a gift in a virginal marriage. In John Paul II’s application of the nuptial meaning of the body to the marriage of Mary and Joseph, the Roman Pontiff wrote the following: “At the culmination of the history of salvation, when God reveals his love for humanity through the gift of the Word, it is precisely the marriage of Mary and Joseph that brings to realization in full ‘freedom’ the ‘spousal gift of self’ in receiving and expressing such a love.”¹¹¹

In fact, the self-donation between Mary and Joseph in their marriage was so profound that it “brought Joseph so spiritually close to Mary and through her, to Jesus, that Joseph is second only to Mary in human holiness.”¹¹² Dodd further argues that the Virgin and St. Joseph were able to express conjugal love, but through the means of affection and work. She also observes the significance of the example of the Holy Family for married couples practicing natural family planning, saying “Mary and Joseph give hope to married couples to live their vocations to

¹¹⁰ TOB 110:8.

¹¹¹ Gloria Falcão Dodd, “The Nuptial Meaning of the Body in the Marriage of Mary and Joseph,” in *The Virgin Mary and the Theology of the Body*, ed. Donald H. Calloway, MIC (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2005.), 117. Cf. *Redemptoris Custos*, 7.

¹¹² Dodd, “The Nuptial Meaning,” 119, cf. Leo XIII, *Quamquam pluries*, Aug. 15, 1889.

mutual self-donation even when periodic or even permanent abstinence is required.”¹¹³

It is not as though the only Mariological fruit in John Paul II’s theology-of-the-body audiences is to be gleaned from the one we have been focusing upon. Much to the contrary, the whole of these audiences provides added fruit when read with a Mariological eye. The interpersonal relationships within the Holy Family have significance for religious, as we have seen, and for married couples. Of course, their example extends to all humanity, because of the eschatological dimension of the body.¹¹⁴ The centrality of the Son in the life of the Holy Family is an image of the beatific vision. The Holy Family, in all its perfection as a communion of persons, points forward to divinized humans in all their glory and anticipates the resurrection of the dead on the last day, when the elect will neither be married nor given in marriage: “For your Creator is your husband, Lord of Hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your redeemer.”¹¹⁵

V. Conclusion

In sum, if one calls to mind the Christology of the conciliar era, one finds the Virgin-Mother at the source of the mode of union of the two natures of Christ. The reverence paid to her is different from the adoration given to her Son, yet the filial piety shown her seems to be an attempt to imitate the action of the Son himself, who has taken on a debt to his mother. The Fathers rightly recognized in reverencing the body of Our Lady the

¹¹³ Dodd, “The Nuptial Meaning,” 124.

¹¹⁴ Cf. TOB 67:2–68:6.

¹¹⁵ Is. 54:5, cf. TOB 95:6.

supreme sanctity of the body and soul of this woman who had become the very locus of the Incarnation. From her, all life and blessing flow.

The same sorts of reflections occur in the Medieval West, such as those of the *Psalterium*. Therein, one observes how the author reflects reverently upon the physical members of Our Lady's body, in order to praise her saving solicitude. Not only are the members of her body worth praising with sublime reverence, but also the excellence of her soul and moral character. Her beauty is most desirable. She is the anchor of the religious life and advocate of each believer, able to bestow mercy with unfailing certitude.

Finally, the virginal communion of persons in the Holy Family reflects Trinitarian and Christological dimensions, according to John Paul II. As such, it is an image both for the religious and married vocations, since it is in truth the perfection of each simultaneously. Only in the perfectly fecund virginity of the love of Mary and Joseph could the Christ become incarnate, whose very origins were hidden in the mystery of the love of the Holy Family.

At this point, it is worthwhile to turn aside to John Paul II's dissertation director, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, to help one absorb some of these more challenging aspects of Catholic Mariology. Garrigou-Lagrange explains that as Christ, by his predestination, is the exemplary cause of adoptive sonship for the faithful, so the Virgin-Mother, "associated with her Son, is the exemplary cause of the life of the elect."¹¹⁶ Exemplary causality is the extent to which a model or type is the cause of

¹¹⁶ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour*, 169.

all in its order because of the degree of its perfection.¹¹⁷ Here it seems that Garrigou-Lagrange found a meeting place between the scholasticism of St. Thomas and the path for neo-scholastic Mariology following the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Our Lady is that exemplary cause that is first in God’s mind as he forms the elect, which is why she is the eschatological sign of the life of the world to come.¹¹⁸ Mary’s perfection is subordinate to her Son’s, infinitely so, if one were to compare the hypostases of Christ and Our Lady. On the level of human nature, though, their perfection is the same. She is the most perfect *mere human*. One cannot even conceive of the hypostasis of a mere creature—even an angelic one—responding to the divine initiative in a more perfect way than Our Lady. Thus, Garrigou-Lagrange can say with de Montfort:

“To Mary alone has God given the keys of the cellars of divine love, and the power to enter on the highest and most secret ways of perfection and to lead others thereto.” Those words make clear the scope of Mary’s

¹¹⁷ So, for another example, the glorification of Christ in his Ascension and enthronement is the exemplary cause of the glorification of all of the saved because of its perfection.

¹¹⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange adeptly extends Thomas’s teaching about exemplary causality into Mariology. Thomas had said that “God himself is the first exemplar of all things” (*STh.*, I q.44 a.3 resp.: *ipse Deus est primum exemplar omnium*). He does make a distinction, though, in saying “first exemplary cause,” which does not rule out for Thomas exemplarity in the order of creatures. He continues in the same response: “Moreover, in things created one may be called the exemplar of another by the reason of its likeness thereto, either in species, or by the analogy of some kind of imitation” (*Possunt etiam in rebus creatis quaedam aliorum exemplaria dici, secundum quod quaedam sunt ad similitudinem aliorum, vel secundum eamdem speciem, vel secundum analogiam alicujus imitationis*). This application of Thomism makes for some intriguing possibilities between Dominican and Franciscan thought as well.

spiritual maternity by which she forms the elect and leads them to the tern of their predestination.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Garrigou-Lagrance, *Mother of the Saviour*, 170. One can readily perceive the great significance of exemplary causality in confronting the charges of certain feminist theologians who are eager to strip Mary of her perpetual virginity. With Mother and Son on equal footing with respect to glorified human nature, the feminist objection to Catholic theology wanes. Yet, even for some who seem to perceive the Catholic teaching on the Virgin-Mother, they reject the heroic role of Mary in salvation (much in the same way that some authors reject Christ's perfection and insist on his being just like us, even in sin). Consider, for example, the conclusions of Maria Mar Perez-Gil, who advocates a completely carnal "Mariology of the Body." She writes:

Catholic tradition further says she was conceived free from original sin and remained a virgin both during and after delivery. These beliefs have been interpreted both literally and symbolically. But the literal view has held pre-eminence and proved detrimental to women in its fostering of an ideal spiritual or sacred body that arises from a de-sexualisation of maternity, leading to a system of difference and exclusion.

... Parallel to the discipline of Body Theology, I would like to propose a Mariology of the Body that considers Mary in and through the flesh and brings her within a corporeal unity with women, particularly through the language of sexualised maternity. My starting point will be Luce Irigaray's incarnational theology, which regards the body as immanently divine and makes its process of divinisation an equally linguistic task. For Irigaray, women have no words that convey their physical divinity or give expression to their selves. This is more evident in the case of the mother: the 'body that gives life never enters into language,' says Irigaray. The images and metaphors of the father superimpose on reality and extirpate from language the imagery of the womb, the mother and the placenta. Patriarchy demeans the mother's power to give life and privileges a patrilineal genealogy in which man appears as the 'sole creator.'

If one considers that Mary merited *de congruo* all that Christ perfectly merited *de condigno*, this means that she merited the life of grace for every believer.¹²⁰ Moreover, she merited *de congruo* not only the grace of the sacraments but also, by way of extension, the vocation of each individual believer. This is the significance of Mary's beauty, a beauty *for* her spiritual children.

Author Biography

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While many of the teachings of the Fathers are given voice in this article, there is no real dialogue with the great work being done on the topic in modern orthodox Catholic scholarship (no mention even of John Paul II!), nor is there an authentic representation of the significance of the Virgin's body for the restoration of all of humanity, suffering under the yoke of original sin, which the author seems to deny. For example, she writes, "Rather than making the Virgin one with women, the experience of childbirth sets her apart from them." Never mind that Judeo-Christian theology actually confesses labor pains to be a consequence of original sin. See. Maria Mar Perez-Gil, "Mary and the Carnal Maternal Genealogy: Towards a Mariology of the Body," *Literature & Theology*, 25, no. 3 (2011): 297–311.

¹²⁰ For his discussion on the three types of merit, see Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour*, 178–85. Pope St. Pius X also mentions these distinctions briefly in *Ad diem illum laetissimum*, 14.

forthcoming articles on Scripture, the Church Fathers, and Our Lady.