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Abstract

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The underlying question will be that of how Mary's contribution to the Cross and the Eucharist should be integrated into the overall theology of creation and salvation; and the article concludes with the suggestion that we need to recover an awareness of the integrity of creation, Annunciation, and Crucifixion, and of how these are realised in the liturgy.

Introduction

The theological theme of Mary as sacrificer at Calvary and in the Eucharist is one that was most fully developed during the Tridentine period, and this article will be largely—though not exclusively—concerned with arguments on this subject that were put forward in the centuries between the Council of Trent (1545-63) and Vatican II (1962-65).

The questions of Mary's relationship to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and to the sacrifice of the Mass are ones that a number of mariologists since the seventeenth century have pursued in connection with the question of Mary's co-redemption. More recently, the matter of Mary's relationship to the eucharistic sacrifice has been taken up by authors arguing for the ordination of women to the priesthood. Although these topics constitute the principal focus of some of the literature that will be discussed here, this article will not address either of them directly. Rather, the underlying question will be that of how Mary's contribution to the Cross and the Eucharist should be integrated into the overall theology of creation and salvation; and the article will conclude with the suggestion that we need to recover an awareness of the integrity of creation, Annunciation, and Crucifixion, and of how these are realised in the liturgy.

By way of preamble, I shall outline some of the ancient and medieval background to the developments that followed the Council of Trent.

Before Trent

From the patristic period until the end of the Tridentine era, many homilies for the Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple speak of her as the sacrificial victim, a perfect oblation to God.¹

¹ See, for example, a homily of St Tarasius (d.806), PG 98, 1485; quoted in René Laurentin, *Marie, l'Eglise et le Sacerdoce: 1. Essai sur le Développement d'une Idée Religieuse*, Paris: Lethielleux, 1952, 49. See also St German of Constantinople, 'Fourth Homily on the Presentation,' PG 98, 310C. Examples run throughout Laurentin's study.



Likewise, many homilies for the Feast of the Purification, or Presentation of Christ in the Temple, present Mary as offering her son, sometimes in an ascendant offering to God (or a *peace offering*) and sometimes in a descendant offering to humanity. However, René Laurentin, in his magisterial work on the idea of Mary as priest, says, 'The idea that Mary offered her Son in sacrifice to God was never expressed before the twelfth century,' and that the main promoter of this way of thinking was St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153).² In a sermon for the Feast of the Purification, Bernard writes:

Offer your son, O sacred Virgin, and present to the Lord the blessed fruit of your womb. Offer this holy victim, pleasing to God, for the reconciliation of us all. God the Father will entirely accept the new oblation, the most precious victim of whom he himself has said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'³

So St Bernard writes of Mary offering Christ as 'the new oblation' for our 'reconciliation.' Another Cistercian, Bl. Gueric of Igny (1070/80-1157), speaks of Mary offering the child to God, and presents her as a model for priests celebrating Mass. Gueric goes on to say that the virtues necessary to the priest are also necessary to the faithful, since it is not the priest alone who consecrates and sacrifices the body of Christ; rather, the whole assembly of the faithful who participate in the liturgy 'consecrate with him, sacrifice with him.'⁴ So the sacrifice is made by a common priesthood of the Church, in which all play a part.

St Antoninus of Florence (1389-1459) drew together the two occasions of Marian oblation, and taught that, at her entry into the temple, 'the glorious Virgin sacrificed herself entirely' to God through the hands of the priest, thus giving her the active role of self-offering.⁵ At the Presentation of Christ, 'Mary communicated her sovereign good in offering her Son, first in the temple, then on the Cross.'⁶

In later centuries, the feasts of the Presentation of Mary and the Presentation of Christ retained their importance for reflection on Mary's role as sacrificial victim and offerer. At the

² Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 49 [quotation] and 140.

³ Bernard, 'De Purificatione B. Mariae,' *Sermo III*, *PL* 183, 370C. Cited in Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 142 (with inaccurate reference).

⁴ Gueric of Igny, 'Sermon 5 on the Presentation,' *PG* 185, 87A; quoted in Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 155-6.

⁵ Quoted in Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 175, n.187.

⁶ Quoted in Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 175.

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seminary of St Sulpice, in Paris—following the teaching of Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) and the seminary's founder, Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-57)—the two Presentation feasts became celebrations of particular importance, in connection with devotion to the *Virgo Sacerdos* as exemplar for priests.⁷

In the later Middle Ages, the idea of Mary's sacrifice came to be associated with her compassion at the Cross. The tying together of these two motifs seems to have begun with another early Cistercian, Arnold of Bonneval (d. after 1156), who, writing of the Crucifixion, said, 'in this sanctuary could be seen two altars, the one in the breast of Mary, the other in the body of Christ. Christ immolated his flesh, Mary her spirit.'⁸ Since Christ was of the same flesh as Mary, and there was a natural unity between them, her spiritual suffering came to be seen as a sacrifice that complemented that which her son accomplished in his body. It was this development which gave rise to the notion that Mary's sacrifice at Calvary was united to Christ's in such a way as to be directly salvific.

The Tridentine Era

In 1600, Giovanni Battista Guarini, a canon of the Lateran Basilica, had a Marian work published with which, in the words of Laurentin, 'he inaugurated this great Marian century'.⁹ Guarini's *Reign of Mary* devotes four pages to Mary's part in the redemptive sacrifice, where her sacrificial role is treated in the chapter concerning her piety.¹⁰ Sacrifice is presented as piety's essential act, and, since all Christians are called to practise piety, the reader might not anticipate the precise sacrificial role that Guarini will attribute to Christ's mother.¹¹ Guarini quotes the passage from St Bernard that has been given above, and continues:

⁷ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 375-82.

⁸ Quoted in Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, 425; see also Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 146-53, esp. 147.

⁹ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 234.

¹⁰ Ibid. Original text in Giovanni Battista Guarini, *Della Gierarchia Overo del Sacro Regno de Maria Vergine ...* Vol.2, Venice: Deuchino and Pulciani, 1609, 190-205.

¹¹ The idea that sacrifice is 'the essence of religion' seems to have enjoyed great popularity from the early modern period until the twentieth century. See Jeffrey Carter, 'General Introduction,' in Jeffrey Carter (ed.), *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader*, London: Continuum, 2003, 1-12, at 8, with examples at 1.

Oh, how great was this oblation which aroused the astonishment of the angels who escorted the Mother of God to the temple! She who could make a sacrifice of that same son on Mount Calvary, on the altar of the Cross, to placate the just designs of God, angry with us and with human nature, because of the sin of our father Adam.

[There follows a quotation from Albert the Great, referring to Mary offering her son ‘under her own species, in which she bore him.’] From there, St John says that she was on Mount Calvary, near the Cross of her son: *Stabat iuxta crucem Iesu mater eius*; which is almost to say that the Blessed Virgin was standing near the Cross of her son, as priests customarily stand at the holy altar when, under the species of bread and wine, they sacrifice and offer to God the sacred body and precious blood of his Son. Standing thus, carrying out the office of High Priestess [*gran sacerdotessa*], I consider that, with her mind raised to Heaven, she would have spoken in this way ...¹²

There follows a prayer of offering, which includes the words: ‘Remember, merciful Father, the sacrifice which I offer you of my own substance; for this flesh is part of my flesh, and this blood is of my own blood.’¹³ These words are followed by an appeal to the fact that Christ is also of the substance of the Father.¹⁴ Subsequently, Guarini associates the sacrifice of the Cross directly with the Mass, when he asks the rhetorical question: ‘And who does not know that the sacrifice that was made by Christ himself and offered by his most holy mother on the altar of the Cross, and that which is offered at the altar by priests, is the same sacrifice?’¹⁵

Laurentin presents Guarini’s work principally as a precursor to that of the Spanish Jesuit, Hernando Chirino de Salazar (1575-1646), whose understanding of Mary’s sacrificial priesthood had great influence on subsequent Catholic mariology.¹⁶ However, a further consideration of Guarini’s own thought may yield a helpful insight into the notion of Mary’s oblation with, and of, her son. Laurentin draws attention to a passage in which there seems to be a confusion between the grammatical singular and plural, when Guarini speaks of Mary’s collaboration with Christ:

¹² Guarini, *Della Gierarchia*, 196.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Guarini, *Della Gierarchia*, 197.

¹⁶ For Guarini as a precursor, see Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 233-4. For Salazar, see Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 242-54.

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I speak of *those* by whom he was offered, who *was* the great Mother of God and the very Son of God, who *have* no equal in the world, just as they have never had, nor will ever have, among all creatures in Heaven and Earth. There has not been, and will not be, any *priest* more worthy or more holy than *they*; for they were without sin, which cannot be said of the priests of the New, nor of the Old, Testaments. The holy apostle says, 'It is necessary for them to make sacrifice first to wash away their own sins, and then those of the people,' which never had to be done by Christ and his blessed Mother, who were pure and innocent. This is why the Apostle Paul, speaking of Christ, says: *Talis decebat ut nobis esset pontifex sanctus, innocens, impollutus, segregatus a peccatoribus, et excelsior coelis factus ...* [Heb. 6:26-7]. ... Considering the dignity and holiness of the *ministers* who made that great sacrifice, none greater was ever made in all the world.¹⁷

Laurentin sees this merging of Christ and Mary as problematical. He says, 'Jesus and Mary are considered here as a single priest, *in confuso*, whence a curious alternation of singulars and plurals.'¹⁸ Laurentin suggests there is a risk of confounding Mary's sacrifice with that of Christ, 'or, more seriously, of substituting it for Christ's, by attributing to Mary in the redemptive sacrifice a *vicarious* role analogous to that of the priest at Mass.'¹⁹ So Laurentin's judgement is that the uniting of Mary's sacrifice with that of Christ suggests that, in this action, she acts as Christ's vicar, or substitute. However, I suggest that we might think about this rather differently: that Guarini does not confuse Mary's action with Christ's, or make Mary Christ's substitute, because this idea presumes that mother and son should be thought of primarily as individuals. We have already seen that Guarini does not think of them in quite this way, for he imagines Mary offering the victim specifically as her own flesh and blood; and this way of thinking—that is, in the categories of *relationship* and *solidarity*—is well established in Catholic tradition. To understand this a little more, I offer the following account by way of comparison.

At Easter, 1533, Hugh Latimer, not yet Bishop of Worcester, was invited to preach in Bristol, but was prevented from doing so by his religious opponents. Afterwards, he reported that, '[t]here is an ancient song in Bristow, in which Our Lady is called *Salvatrix ac Redemptrix*'

¹⁷ Guarini, *Della Gierarchia*, 198. French translation in Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 235-6. Italics in the non-Latin text are taken from Laurentin.

¹⁸ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 236.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

(‘saviour and redeemer’, in the feminine grammatical form). Latimer commented: ‘She might more seemly be called *Salvatoris ac Redemptoris mater*’ (‘mother of the saviour and redeemer’).²⁰ The difference between Latimer and the conservative Bristolians on the subject of titles for Our Lady reveals not only a difference of theological doctrine, but a difference between two ways of conceptualising, and acting in, the social world—a difference that was starting to have important effects on Christian theology and devotion.

For many centuries before the early modern period, as still in many cultures across the globe, a person’s public identity resided primarily in the social groups to which they belonged, such as their kin group, their parish, and their trade guild. More specifically, it resided in their particular relationships within those bodies. Thus, the answer to the question, ‘Who is that man?’ would consist of such designations as, ‘The son of x’, or ‘Mr. z’s journeyman’.²¹ Correspondingly, the action of one member of a household reflected immediately upon the rest of the household, and especially upon closest kin, who were effectively participants in the actions of their parents and offspring. The son who acted honourably was an immediate cause of honour to his parents, whilst the parents of the dishonourable were themselves seen as lacking in honour. Thus, it was quite natural to celebrate in the mother of Christ the actions of her son.

In the early modern period, however, came the growth of an economy and social arrangements that were starting to give priority to the ‘individual’, apart from the social groups to which he or she belonged, and for those who were most involved in such modern developments, the actions of Christ eventually came to be seen as the actions of a lone hero, neither implicating, nor being implicated in, the actions or the moral state of his mother.²² The difference between Latimer and some of the citizens of Bristol expresses just this difference of social attitude. Indeed, I suspect that some traditionally-minded folk would not even have understood the point that Latimer was making.

²⁰ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic: Henry VIII, 1533* (London: HMSO, 1882), 2nd May, 433.ii. Available on line at: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol6/pp193-211>, accessed 28 June 2022.

²¹ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, 3-13.

²² The French sociologist, David Le Breton, has argued that the breakdown of a metaphysical understanding of things primarily in terms of solidarity (as distinct from individuality, or atoms) has its origin in the individualism that began in Renaissance Italy. He seems to regard this development as initially social, rather than economic (David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du Corps et Modernité*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, 44-6. I tend towards an interpretation more influenced by Marxism.

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Perhaps, then, we should think of Guarini's insistence on the unity of Christ and Mary, and the unity of their sacrifice, in the light of this consideration. Guarini was trying to articulate a sense of the unity of mother and son, and the unity of their actions, in a culture that increasingly sought to understand things by means of analysis, rather than synthesis. Moreover, in the case of Jesus and Mary, this is a unity that is especially intense, because it is, in the end, the unity of Christ with his Church and with all humanity—a unity that is central to Catholic teaching. But Guarini was an educated man, writing at a time when many educated people were moving away from ancient ways of thinking—from ways that found explanations by seeking out types, or correspondences, and their participation in one another.²³ So the theological language of the seventeenth century somewhat resisted the analogical and associative ways of thinking that were natural to an earlier age.²⁴ Trent's need to assert that the sacrifice of the Mass is the same as the sacrifice of the Cross, may already be seen as a symptom of such a strain; but Guarini further compounds the identity of the Crucifixion with the Eucharist by adding to it the sacrifice of Mary.

In the treatment of Mary's priesthood undertaken by Salazar, the tension between medieval Catholicism and modern rationalism is made more vivid, when the use of Old Testament types, as well as assumptions about the natural unity of close kin, are subjected to interpretation in the language of legal jurisdiction. Salazar's theory of Mary's contribution to the work of Calvary seems to be given in his commentaries on the books of Proverbs and the Song of Songs.²⁵

²³ Henri de Lubac has noted the decline of typological readings of Scripture in the modern period (Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de l'Écriture*, I:1, Paris: Aubier, 1959, 13-14). Amos Funkenstein has noted the decline of participation and symbolic correspondence as means of understanding the natural world (Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986, 28).

²⁴ Francisco Suárez (1548-1617)—often regarded as the founder of systematic mariology—opted for not using typological and symbolic language, but only a refined form of scholastic argument; St John Eudes (1601-80), author of *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, employed typology and the metaphysics of participation, but with a somewhat artificial feel to it; and Mary of Ágreda (1602-65) wrote down her mystical experiences in prosaic language which, to my mind, feels as if it is in danger of doing violence to the mysteries that it attempts to describe. See Francisco Suárez, *De Mysteriis Vitae Christi: Commentarii et Disputationes in Tertiam Partem D. Thomae* in *Opera Omnia* (ed. Charles Berton), vol. XIX. Paris: Vivès, 1860; St John Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, trans. Charles di Targiani and Ruth Hauser, New York: P.J. Kenedy, 1948; Mary of Ágreda, *Mystical City of God*, 4 vols., trans. Fiscar Marison, Washington, NJ: AML Press, 1996 [1902].

²⁵ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 242-54. I have not been able to find copies of either of these works.

By the seventeenth century, it had long been customary for Catholic interpreters to understand Old Testament texts about Wisdom as referring to the Blessed Virgin, and Salazar continued the tradition in his commentary on Proverbs.²⁶ Thus, in Proverbs 8.19, Wisdom says, 'My fruit is better than gold and precious stones,' and Salazar understands Wisdom as a figure for Mary 'offering "her fruit" (Christ) in sacrifice for the world's redemption'.²⁷ Again, Proverbs 9.2 says, 'Wisdom has slaughtered her beasts, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table,' and, in Proverbs 9.5, Wisdom herself says, 'Come, eat the bread and drink the wine that I have mixed for you.' Salazar interprets these verses as referring to Mary's role in the Eucharist, and his understanding of Mary's oblation at the Crucifixion and in the Eucharist seems to be an absolutely literal one.²⁸ Mary has the power to offer Jesus because, as her son, Jesus belongs to her, and, as his mother, Mary has dominion over him.²⁹ Salazar says that Mary 'immolated', or 'sacrificed', him.³⁰ Moreover, if God the Father had not intervened, and Mary alone had willed that her son should die for humanity, that would have been sufficient for Christ to have accepted death.³¹ Mary makes an *ascendant* offering, or oblation—a *sacrifice* made to God; and she also makes a *descendant* offering—a *gift* made to humanity. In the former, Mary 'confects' the sacrifice; and in the latter, she 'confects' the sacrament.³² The first function is priestly, and the second, royal.³³ In giving her son to the world, Mary resembles God the Father; and in giving her son for the world's sake, she resembles the Son, and thus is priestlike: '*sacerdotali pietate obtulit*'.³⁴ In sum: ' "Since the Virgin's will conspired with the Son's in the confection of the eucharist, ... [we can affirm] that she gave and offered the heavenly bread for us."'³⁵

Although Salazar shows that Mary has a likeness to the Persons of the Trinity, he seems to have broken away from the idea of a natural, or ontological, union of mother and son.

²⁶ This practice had its origin in the liturgical use of Wisdom texts as lections for Marian feasts. Of particular importance are Ecclesiasticus 24.5-3 and Proverbs 8.22-31.

²⁷ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 243.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 244-5.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 246.

³² Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 247.

³³ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 248.

³⁴ Ibid. The theme of Mary's joining priests in offering the eucharistic sacrifice is taken up in Salazar's commentary on the Song of Songs (Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 252).

³⁵ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 249.

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Instead of a union, Mary is shown as having a parental right in her son, and a will that works in perfect co-operation with his. In this, and throughout the Tridentine period, it seems as if Catholic authors have an instinct that Mary is perfectly united to Christ in all things, including his sacrificial action both at Calvary and in the Mass; but theologians and spiritual writers are often trying to articulate this insight in a modern idiom that is not well adapted to it.³⁶

There is a further point to observe here. Although Salazar says that Mary ‘confects’ both the sacrifice and the sacrament, he is apparently hesitant about referring to her directly as a ‘priest’. He says she acts ‘in a certain way in the manner of a priest’.³⁷ Again, in his work on the Song of Songs, Salazar refers to the *Mariale* of Albert the Great (now thought to be pseudonymous), saying that Albert attributes to Mary priestly *functions*, but not *orders*, thereby indicating that he has a reservation about identifying Mary’s office too completely with that of the priest.³⁸ Other authors have reservations of a similar kind, and they make it clear that the reason for their reservations is that Mary is a woman, and a woman cannot be a priest. For example, a relatively unknown author, Jacques le Vasseur, wrote in 1610 that Mary offered, and offers, to God every day the Christ whom God first offered to her. “And is it not she who, without doubt, had offered with her own hands the bleeding sacrifice of her son?”³⁹ Le Vasseur quotes Hebrews 7.25-7:

He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

³⁶ One aspect of the change that took place in the early modern period is a shift from a deep interest in the union of Jesus and Mary in the flesh (as exemplified in the quotations from Guarini), to an emphasis on their union as spiritual (as happens in the work of Salazar). Usually, an account of the bodily union of Jesus and Mary takes as its starting-point the fact that Jesus’s flesh was first his mother’s, so that unity is the initial condition of the relationship between Mary and her son, with separation following on afterwards (e.g., Suárez, in the early sections of *De Mysteriis*). Accounts of union at the level of the soul, by contrast, do not necessarily imply a prior unity; rather, the spiritual union may be something that arises out of the interaction between the two actors.

³⁷ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 249, n.29: ‘sacerdotis in morem ... quodammodo faciens.’

³⁸ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 253. This is not an accurate account of Albert’s text. On the attribution of the *Mariale* to Albert, see Maria Burger, ‘Albert the Great—Mariology,’ in Irven Resnick (ed.), *A Companion to Albert the Great*, Leiden: Brill, 2013,, 105-36.

³⁹ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 240, quoting from Jacques le Vasseur, *Diva Virgo Mediopontana* (1610).

Le Vasseur then says, 'Apart from her sex, almost all of this can be said of the Mother of God.'⁴⁰

Moving on from an unknown to a greatly celebrated spiritual writer, Jean-Jacques Olier, we find a more precise specification of what Mary did, and did not do, in the way of priestly offering:

Although the Most Blessed Virgin had been given to Our Lord, to accompany him in all the circumstances of his sacrifice, where she would stand for the Church, she was not present at the institution of the Eucharist. She had already solicited and obtained its benefit in advance, at the wedding feast at Cana. Since she possessed all the invisible grace of the Apostles and priests, a grace eminently comprised in the fullness of all the gifts that the Holy Spirit had poured into her, Mary did not in any way have to receive—as did the Apostles—the power of offering Jesus Christ externally, under the species of bread and wine: a power which, in any case, is reserved to men alone. The victim of this divine sacrifice, that is to say, the body of Our Lord, belonged in any case to Mary, who had produced it from her own substance; and, as such, she had to offer it not under the veils of the sacrament, but in its human form, in consenting, the next day, to its immolation on Calvary, as she had already done publicly in the Temple on the day of her oblation.⁴¹

Olier is one of the great spiritual writers of the French School, centred on the seminary of St Sulpice, where a prominent focus of devotional life was Mary as *Virgo Sacerdos*.⁴² Olier himself wrote: 'The Blessed Virgin was consecrated priest in advance of the sacrifice that she would one day have to offer.'⁴³ All the same, Olier considers that Mary performs a priestly *function*, but does not have the priestly *character*.⁴⁴

Olier's understanding may be seen, in a certain sense, as representative of the tradition as a whole. Laurentin identifies two explicit points which emerge throughout the history of reflection on the subject of Mary's priesthood: '1. Mary did not receive the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ [Jean-Jacques Olier] *Vie Intérieure de la Très-Sainte Vierge: Ouvrage Recueilli des Ecrits de M. Olier*, Vol.2, Rome: Salviucci, 1866, 38-40. Olier goes on to say that she was present at the Last Supper in a spiritual manner, and that she offered the eucharistic mystery in an interior way.

⁴² Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 375-82.

⁴³ Quoted in Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 382, and in François Trémolières, 'Monsieur Olier et Ses Peintres,' *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 237:1 (2020), 62-82, at 74.

⁴⁴ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 371.

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sacrament of orders because she was a woman. 2. She is superior to sacramental priests.⁴⁵ Yet, as we have seen, this does not prevent her from being seen as a sacrificer at the Crucifixion, and it barely constrains her association with the priest's offering of the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

As it turned out, the impossibility of women's being ordained to the sacramental priesthood led to a particular development in the tradition of Mary's own priestly offering. For during the nineteenth century, a number of women recorded that they had a burning desire to be priests, but, realising that this was impossible, they turned instead to the spirituality of 'victim souls'. Understanding their calling by reference to Romans 12.1, 'Offer your bodies to God as a living sacrifice,' they dedicated themselves to supporting the clergy, in various ways, in lives of self-immolation.⁴⁶ Over time, the spiritual lives of the victim souls came to give prominence to the priesthood of the Virgin Mary, the *Virgo Sacerdos*.⁴⁷ For example, Mother Claret de la Touche founded a women's order dedicated to praying for priests, along with an association of priests. On Christmas Eve, 1904, she received a revelation of Mary's priesthood, in which she was given to understand that Mary became a priest on the day of the Incarnation. This meant that she received the power to sacrifice Jesus; and she offered him to the Father every day.⁴⁸

A lively cult of the Virgin Priest grew up; but, in 1913, the Holy Office condemned 'the image of the Virgin dressed in priestly robes'.⁴⁹ In curial circles, there was more general unease about the cult of the *Virgo Sacerdos*, which Laurentin, among others, attributes to a fear that the title would be misunderstood—that is to say, that it might lead people to think that Mary was a priest in the sense of the Church's earthly hierarchy.⁵⁰ However, this did not stop theological discussion about Mary's role as sacrificer, which continued in the context of

⁴⁵ René Laurentin, *Marie, l'Eglise et le Sacerdoce, 2: Etude Théologique*, Paris: Lethielleux, 1953, 37.

⁴⁶ Laurentin, *Marie, 1*, 422-3. Although they are called 'victim' souls, they are, in their self-offering, also performing the function of a priest—'the royal priesthood conferred on all Christians,' as Laurentin says (423).

⁴⁷ Laurentin, *Marie, 1*, 422-36. The growth of devotion to the Virgin Priest seems to have been influenced in no small measure by Bl. Marie Deluil-Martiny (1841-84), foundress of the Daughters of the Heart of Jesus, whose ideas were developed in Mgr. van den Berghe's influential work, *Marie et le Sacerdoce*, Brussels and Paris: Haenen and Laroche, 1872. It is hard not to suppose that Mary's priesthood performed a vicarious function for the women who chose to be victim souls.

⁴⁸ Laurentin, *Marie, 1*, 429-30.

⁴⁹ AAS 8 (1916), 146.

⁵⁰ Laurentin, *Marie, 1*, 536.

debates about the title Co-Redemptrix. For example, in 1942, the Spanish Mariological Society discussed the question of Marian co-redemption, and one of the contributors, Fr. R. Rabanos, argued that Mary was sacrificer, offering both herself and her son. He said that, at the Annunciation, Mary gave her consent to be the mother of the Redeemer; and at the Cross, she renewed that consent in order to make the sacrifice.⁵¹

So, when writing about Mary's priesthood and sacrifice at Calvary, the main anxiety that post-Tridentine authors express is to do with Mary's sex. Nowadays, the Catholic theologian might be concerned about a more properly theological question, namely, the danger of undermining the doctrine of the unique mediatorship of Christ. In line with what I have written above, I suggest that the Tridentine era's relative lack of concern over this matter stems from a conviction that there is an underlying unity of mother and son. Theologically, what this means is that he, by nature, participates in her humanity, and she, by grace, participates in his divinity, and that she does this in a uniquely high degree. This understanding does not compromise the doctrine of Christ's mediation; on the contrary, it is only because of Christ's own sacrifice that Mary's co-operation can be of salvific importance.

A metaphysical account of the union of Christ and Mary is effectively given by Olier himself.⁵² Drawing on the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, he understands the world's relationship to Christ in terms of *participation*.⁵³ In this scheme, Mary is the first of creatures and 'the universal creature', who has the fullest possible participation in Christ.⁵⁴ The Church is then 'a part of Mary', and the clergy, 'a part of the Church'.⁵⁵ Laurentin likens Olier's understanding to that of the often quoted *Mariale* of (pseudo-)Albert the Great, which contains the principle of what Laurentin terms Mary's 'omnicontinence'.⁵⁶ That is to say, all

⁵¹ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 584. The theme of the Annunciation will be taken up later on in this article.

⁵² Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 363-75. Many of Laurentin's quotations are from manuscript sources.

⁵³ Another of the French School's representatives, Jean Eudes, also writes of Mary's union with Christ in this way; and, like Olier, he understands her as a sort of archetypal creature in whom all others participate.

⁵⁴ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 364.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 369, for the comparison with Albert. See pages 183-207 for a description of Albert's *Mariale* and the influence of the principle of omnicontinence. The Jesuit, Laurence Chrysogonus (1590-1650), similarly writes of Mary as 'mirror of the archetypal world' (that is, of God), 'mirror of the heavenly world', and 'mirror of the sublunary world' (Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 270. Laurentius Chrysogonus, *Mundi Mariani Pars Prima: Speculum Mundi Archetypi seu Divinitatis*, Vienna: Mattaeus Cosmerovius, 1646; *Mundus Marianus Pars Secunda: Maria Speculum Mundi Coelestis*, Vienna: Patavius, 1651; *Mundus Marianus sive Maria Speculum Mundi Sublunaris*, Vienna: Philippus Jacobus Veith, 1712.

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the virtues of God's creation are present in her in the most eminent way, and consequently, she must—in one way or another—incorporate the office of priest. What Olier does is to supply the theory to account for the reality of Catholic experience of Mary's union with Christ in all things.

Responses to the Tridentine Notion of Marian Sacrifice

The post-Tridentine interest in Mary's participation in Christ's salvific self-sacrifice and its eucharistic realisation arose out of a wider emphasis on the sacrifice of the Cross in the Mass, which was a marked feature of early modern Catholicism. In more recent times, feminists, and scholars interested in gender theory, have addressed the question of Mary's involvement in Christ's sacrifice and the Mass, in connection with the prohibition on women's ordination to the priesthood. I shall mention two, very different, examples of such work.

Cleo McNelly Kearns has put forward an original account of Mary's connection to the bloody sacrifice of the Cross and its enactment in the Eucharist.⁵⁷ She draws heavily on the work of Nancy Jay, in order to understand the exclusion of women from the priesthood of the Catholic Church, but also to understand the representation of Mary as priest.⁵⁸ Jay argues that a widespread form of sacrifice is that which establishes and maintains a patriline—descent from father to son. This form of sacrifice usually involves bloodshed, with the complete destruction of the animal; and, by excluding the mother's immediate involvement in the action, it is ensured that the line of descent is that of the male. If, as happens with the story that Christians call the 'sacrifice of Isaac' (Gen. 22), the animal is a substitute for the son, then the sacrifice evidently restores the son to the father as his own. In the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, the Father offers the Son for sacrifice, but has him decisively restored on the third day. Because this drama is concerned with the relationship between father and son, the priesthood that enacts it is also exclusively male.

⁵⁷ Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Because of restrictions on travel at the time of writing, I have not been able to check references in this work, but have relied on my own review of it (*Religion* 40 (2010), 212-13).

⁵⁸ Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Kearns argues that Mary is made a partial exception to this, because she is unlike other women. In particular, her perpetual virginity ensures that her son's father is supernatural, so there is no doubt about the patriline. Mary is, in effect, the exception who proves the rule.

Jay also examines sacrifice of a different kind, namely, alimentary sacrifice. This is concerned primarily with the sharing of sacred food, and it helps to perpetuate communal identity.⁵⁹ It demonstrates the equality and inclusion of community members, and, in this kind of celebration, women may play a prominent role. This is one aspect of the Christian Eucharist, and Jay argues that those churches which emphasise the communal aspect of the Eucharist are more likely to allow women to preside, whilst the Catholic Church excludes women from the priesthood because it holds that the Mass is the re-presentation of Christ on the Cross.⁶⁰

A major weakness of Kearns's work (and, to some extent, of Jay's) is that it does not take sufficient account of the extent to which Catholic tradition includes the Incarnation in its understanding of priestly action at the Eucharist. The words of institution—or of consecration—not only make present Christ's actions at the Last Supper, but, because they include the declarations, 'This is my body,' and 'This is my blood,' they also render present the Lord's own body and blood, first made present in his mother. So the Eucharist is not only the communal meal plus the sacrifice; it is also the work of the Incarnation. The notion that Mary gives the Church the bread of life is well established in Christian tradition, with the change in the elements sometimes being directly associated with the Annunciation.⁶¹ A rare liturgical example from the Western Church comes from the ninth century, in the *Book of Hours* of Charles the Bald. Here, the response of the faithful to the Orate Fratres is: 'May the Holy Spirit come upon you, and the power of the Most High overshadow you.'⁶² The thirteenth-century liturgical texts known as the Worcester Fragments associate the chalice with the Virgin's womb, in a communion antiphon: 'Blessed womb of the Virgin Mary, which, heavy with fruit, seeded in eternity, diligently carried, for us, humanity, in the cup of life, the

⁵⁹ Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*, 17-29.

⁶⁰ Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*, 112-27.

⁶¹ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 34-47, gives examples from the patristic and early medieval periods.

⁶² Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 42-3.

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drink of all sweetness.’⁶³ Several centuries later, Pierre de Bérulle and the other priests of St Sulpice again emphasised that the priest’s consecration of the elements is a new realisation of the mystery of the Incarnation that was first accomplished in, and by, Mary.

A text that seems to stand at the foundation of the idea that Mary’s sacrifice was specifically priestly is one that was attributed to Epiphanius, but is now believed to have been written by an author of the seventh or eighth century.⁶⁴ The Greek text is somewhat obscure; but one thing that seems to be clear, both in the Greek manuscripts and their Latin translations, is that Mary is referred to as ‘priest’ and ‘altar’, and as the one ‘who has given us Christ, heavenly bread, for the remission of sins.’⁶⁵ The context in which this is written is a passage in praise of the divine motherhood, in which Mary is hailed with a succession of greetings that address her womb: ‘O womb unpolluted,’ ‘O womb wider than the heavens,’ etc.⁶⁶ So the imagery of priesthood and sacrifice is associated directly with her miraculous childbearing.

René Laurentin observes: ‘For a long time, the titles *Salvatrix* and *Redemptrix* signified only that Mary had borne Christ who saves us and redeems us. Little by little, they came to signify an immediate co-operation of Mary in the work of redemption, and in its essential act: the sacrifice of the Cross.’⁶⁷ Yet surely the change that took place was not a move from, on the one hand, seeing Mary as contributing to an *inessential* aspect of the work of salvation, to seeing her, instead, as co-operating in the sacrifice that was *essential*? Is it not rather the case that there was always a recognition of Mary’s co-operation in the work of salvation, but that a change took place in the understanding of the location of that work. That is to say, instead of salvation being seen as occurring throughout the Lord’s life, death, and

⁶³ Denis Stevens (arr.), *The Worcester Fragments*, Eastwood, Essex: Basil Ramsey, 1981, 23-4: *Beata viscera, Mariae Virginis, Quae fructu gravida aeterni germinis, In vitae poculo, propter nos hominis, Portabant sedulo potum dulcedinis.*

⁶⁴ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 28 and 43-7.

⁶⁵ The Greek text, as given in Migne and, according to Laurentin, the best manuscript, is as follows: *Ω Παρθένε, φρικτόν της Εκκλησίας κειμήλιον, το μέγα τυχόν μυστήριον, ιερέα καλει την Παρθένον ομου τε και θυσιασστηριον. ήτις τραπεζοφορούσα τον ουράνιον άρτον Χριστόν έδωκεν ημών εις άφεσιν αμαρτιών* (BN ms. Grec 1173; quoted in Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 29. PG 43, 497A). The Latin translation in Migne is: ‘O Virginem, stupendum Ecclesiae thesaurum, qui adeptus est ingens mysterium, Virginem appellat velut sacerdotem pariter, et altare; quae quidem mensam ferens, dedit nobis coelestem panem Christum in remissionem peccatorum.’ (PG 43, 498, AB)

⁶⁶ PG 43 497B / 498B.

⁶⁷ Laurentin, *Marie*, 1, 138.

resurrection, the Crucifixion alone came to be seen as that which is properly salvific (as expressed in the quotation from Laurentin). Concomitantly, the experience of the Eucharist became increasingly focussed on the sacrifice of the Cross, and a similar shift of emphasis occurred in the understanding of Mary's co-operation. This is a distortion of perspective which perhaps needs to be rectified: mariological corrections will be part and parcel of this process.

The understanding of the Eucharist as integrating the whole work of salvation, and including Mary in that work, is found in the writing of some feminist theologians. For example, Tina Beattie has contended that, since the Eucharist enacts not only the sacrifice of the Cross, but also the Incarnation through Mary (and, indeed, birth from Christ and from the Church), it is fitting that the female body, as well as the male, should fulfill a priestly function at the eucharistic celebration.⁶⁸

Karen O'Donnell sums up well Mary's connection to the sacrifice of her son in the context of her connection to the Eucharist. In her *fiat*, Mary makes a sacrificial self-offering which, in turn,

makes the sacrificial self-offering of the Father and the self-giving response of the Son really present in her womb. It is at this moment, and through her agreement, that the Incarnate Christ becomes particularly present in the world. Thus her role is also essential in a soteriological sense—through Mary's *fiat* salvation is made available to humankind. ... Mary's sacrificial self-offering ... also ... reveals to us the Trinitarian model of self-offering that is the intrinsic hinge to Christian sacrifice. Furthermore, it reveals to us the Incarnate Christ. Mary's sacrificial self-offering can, therefore, be considered to be sacramental. Her self-offering makes visible and present the mutual, sacrificial self-giving that is at work within the Trinity.⁶⁹

At this point, we should also call to mind the tradition that associates Mary with the whole created order: as containing, or exemplifying, it (as found, for example, in the writing of Olier). Surely the Eucharist describes, and potentially reveals, the whole mystery of creation and salvation? For many centuries, it was believed that the historical date of the

⁶⁸ Tina Beattie, 'Mary, Eve and the Church', in *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies*, 2 (2001), 5-20, esp. 16-17.

⁶⁹ Karen O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary, and the Body in Trauma Theology*, London: SCM Press, 2018, 121.

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Crucifixion was March 25th, the date of the Annunciation. It was thus implied that the two formed a single mystery, as they do in the celebration of Mass. But March 25th was also honoured as the date on which the world was created. So we can see the creation, Annunciation, and Crucifixion as constituting a single mystery, with the Annunciation as its turning point. It is surely within this cosmic, as well as Marian-ecclesial, context that the sacrifice of the Eucharist should be understood. Edward Kilmartin has urged us to understand the inner connection between the Eucharist and the Cross as that of 'the commemorative actual presence of the Cross' in the liturgy.⁷⁰ But the Cross is bound to the Incarnation and the world's re-creation; so perhaps we should see in the Eucharist a great web of inner connections, namely, the commemorative actual presence of the whole mystery of creation's origin and destiny in God.

⁷⁰ Edward J. Kilmartin, SJ, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*, ed. Robert J. Daly, SJ, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 172.