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Title: Renewed Perspectives on *Lumen Gentium's* Marian-Ecclesiological Synthesis

Abstract:

Pope Paul VI referred to the final chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, in which the council Fathers achieved a synthesis of Mariology and ecclesiology as 'the crown and summit of the whole Constitution on the Church'. Yet, this inclusion of Mary within the discussion of the Church has not fully penetrated our ecclesiological awareness. In this study, I revisit the Marian debates of the Second Vatican Council to explore the significance of Council's vision of integration for a renewal of ecclesiology today. Following a brief survey of the history of chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* and the movements of renewal which guided the work of the Council, I will explore two Marian titles which underscore the mysterious spiritual and theological affinity between Mary and the Church, both as agents of communion. These are *Mater Ecclesiae* and *Mediatrix*, and both dovetail with the Council's sacramental ecclesiology. In view of the relative post-conciliar neglect of the Council's Mariology, my goal in revisiting the Marian debates is to come to a deeper appreciation of the Council's key insights on Mary so that they might bear fruit in ecclesiological considerations today. *Mater Ecclesiae* and *Mediatrix* help to advance an appreciation of the perichoretic relationship of Mary and the Church and of the essence of the Church's mission and motherhood.

Introduction: A Vatican III Council?

In his book, *Being as Communion*, John Zizioulas, the Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop of Pergamon, comments that Vatican II's rediscovery of the theologies of the laity and of the local Church, coupled with the introduction of the notion of communion into ecclesiology, have altogether constituted substantial steps forward in the ecumenical enterprise. He insists, however, that 'much more needs to be done, for Vatican II has not completed its work'. The Metropolitan goes on to make this striking comment: 'What an Orthodox sharing the views of this exposé would like to be done – *perhaps by a "Vatican III" – is to push the notion of communion to its ontological conclusions*'.¹ Zizioulas further asserts the need for an ontology of communion: 'We need to make communion condition the very being of the Church, not the well-being but the being of it.'² To this assertion, one might reply that the Catholic Church has already begun to do so at the Second Vatican Council, when after much debate and deliberation, it determined to devote a chapter of *Lumen Gentium* to a figure of communion, namely the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Pope Paul VI referred to the final chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, in which the council Fathers achieved a synthesis of Mariology and ecclesiology, as 'the crown and summit of the whole Constitution on the Church'.³ Yet, this inclusion of Mary within the discussion of the Church has not fully penetrated our ecclesiological awareness. In this study, I revisit the Marian debates of the Second Vatican Council to explore the significance of Council's vision of integration for a renewal of ecclesiology today. Following a brief survey of the history of chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* and the movements of renewal which guided the work of the Council, I will explore two Marian titles which underscore the mysterious spiritual and theological affinity between Mary and the Church, both as agents of communion. These are *Mater Ecclesiae* and *Mediatrix*, and both dovetail with the Council's sacramental ecclesiology.

¹ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1985, 141.

² Ibid.

³ Pope Paul VI, Closing speech of the third session of Vatican Council II (21 November 1964); available online at http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641121_conclusions-iii-sessions.html. For an English translation of the relevant Marian section, see <https://www.ewtn.com/fatima/papal-documents/pope-paul-VI/1964Paul6.htm>.



In view of the relative post-conciliar neglect of the Council's Mariology, my goal in revisiting the Marian debates is to come to a deeper appreciation of the Council's key insights on Mary so that they might bear fruit in ecclesiological considerations today. *Mater Ecclesiae* and *Mediatrix* help to advance an appreciation of the perichoretic relationship of Mary and the Church and of the essence of the Church's mission and motherhood.

Vatican II's Debates on the Marian Treatise

Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) once described the Mariology of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) as 'a magna carta of Mariology for our era'.⁴ Yet, this final chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, in its genesis, constituted one of the most contentious debates of the Council.⁵ When the Marian schema appeared for discussion in the second session in 1963, two divergent tendencies in Mariology became manifest. These are commonly referred to as the Christotypical and Ecclesiotypical approaches.⁶ The Christotypical approach focused on Mary's unique role in salvation history and the singular graces endowed upon her as Mother of Christ. Proponents of this approach, represented by Cardinal Santos of Manila and advocated by many bishops in the Roman Curia, advocated a separate treatise on Mary. In contrast, the Ecclesiotypical approach, represented by Cardinal König of Vienna, advanced an integrated schema which underscored Mary's relationship to the Church as its preeminent member. A historical vote which took place on 29 October 1963 was indicative of the extent to which these two positions diverged. Responding to the question, 'Would it please the Fathers for the schema on the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, to be integrated into the schema *De Ecclesia?*', 2,188 votes were casted. Of these, there were 1,114 *placet*

⁴ John Paul II, 'Discourse at General Audience of May 2, 1979,' *L'Osservatore Romano* (English language edition) 9 May 1979, 1.

⁵ The historical account and analysis provided here relies on René Laurentin, 'The era of Vatican II and its preparation' in *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary*, Washington: Ami Press, 1991, 142-152; and Joseph Ratzinger, 'Thought on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole' in Joseph Ratzinger & Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary, the Church at the Source*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997, 19-36. For comprehensive studies of chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium*, see Giuseppe M. Besutti, *Lo Schema Mariano al Concilio Vaticano II*, Rome: Marianum/Descleé, 1966, and Cesare Antonelli, *Il dibattito su Maria nel Concilio Vaticano II. Percorso redazionale sulla base di nuovi documenti di archivio*, Bibliotheca Berica, 14, Padova: Edizioni Messaggero di Sant' Antonio, 2009. For works in English, see volume 37 of *Marian Studies* (1986) and Jared Wicks, 'Recent Scholarship on Vatican Council II', *Catholic Historical Review* 105:3, 2019, 546-58.

⁶ Laurentin, *Short Treatise*, 167-170; see also Alberic Stacpoole, *Mary and the Churches*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1990, 85-95.

votes and 1,074 *non placet* votes – a slim forty votes separating the two parties. Had only twenty of the 2,188 votes changed, the outcome would have been altered entirely. There was a deep divide amongst the Council fathers, and only after extensive debate and multiple drafts of the schema did the Council reach a near unanimous consensus. The final vote a year later, on 18 November 1964, yielded an overwhelming 2,096 *placet* votes out of 2123 votes total. Nonetheless, the initial voting which revealed the tension between the Christotypical and Ecclesiotypical views reflected the tensions of a Church on the verge of renewal.

The Signs of the Times

The decades preceding the Council experienced an irruption of renewal from two concurrent movements within the Church.⁷ The first consisted of the Marian movement, developing particularly from the Marian apparitions of the nineteenth century and the proclamation of new Marian dogmas, namely the Immaculate Conception (1854) and Assumption of Mary into heaven (1950). One subsequently finds, therefore, between the First World War and the Second Vatican Council, a proliferation of ecclesial documents promoting Marian devotions as well as the founding of numerous religious orders in Mary's name – all signs of the special honor and prominence attributed to Our Lady by the pre-conciliar Church.

Alongside this Marian piety, there was an additional current of liturgical renewal which drew its force from the developments of the ecumenical and biblical movements.⁸ These new impulses would eventually find their expression in the Conciliar documents. For example, liturgical renewal was set forth in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*; the fruits of the biblical movement found expression in *Dei Verbum*; and ecumenical theology was similarly propounded in *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The relationship between the Marian movement and the liturgical-biblical-ecumenical movements of *ressourcement*, however, had not yet been explicitly defined at the time the Council first convened. The seemingly divergent orientations between them presented inevitable tensions. For example, the liturgical movement described its own piety as objective and sacramental and contrasted itself to the characterization of

⁷ Laurentin, *Short Treatise*, 144-152.

⁸ Ratzinger, *Mary, the Church at the Source*, 19-20.

Marian piety as subjective and personal. Additionally, liturgical renewal was rooted in Scripture with a theocentric orientation to Christian prayer as addressed to the Father through Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Marian piety, which was heavily characterized by medieval devotions and the Marian apparitions of the century, promoted prayer as ‘from Mary to Jesus’.⁹ Moreover, the prominence given to the glories of Mary was often judged to be an obstacle to ecumenical unity and referred to by some as ‘Mariolatry’. It is thus of no surprise that these movements constituted the theological undercurrents driving the concerns of the Council whose work hinged upon the task of establishing a fruitful unity.¹⁰

The Council eventually achieved this with its placement of the Marian treatise *within*, rather than apart from, the constitution on the Church. In effect, the integration precluded Mariology from developing as an isolated body of doctrine. This perspective represented a solid move away from deductive styles of Mariology which focused solely on Mary’s privileges and titles, toward a more solid presentation of her role in the mystery of salvation based in the sources of Scripture and patristic tradition where she is seen as a figure or type of the Church.¹¹ *Lumen Gentium* remains an essential milestone in Catholic theology, but its formidable Marian-ecclesiological synthesis has yet to be fully received. This neglect of the post-conciliar Church is symptomatic of the polemics concerning two Marian titles which were heatedly debated at the Council: *Mater Ecclesiae* and *Mediatrix*.¹² To these we next turn, with a view to considering how one might – in the words of Hugo Rahner – ‘learn once more what was so treasured by the early Church: learn to see the Church in our Lady and our Lady in the Church’.¹³

***Mater Ecclesiae* and the balance of papal primacy and episcopal collegiality**

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹¹ Charles Moeller, ‘History of *Lumen Gentium*’s Structure and Ideas’ in John Miller (ed.), *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, 141.

¹² For extensive discussions of the title *Mater Ecclesiae*, see Johann Roten, ‘Mater Ecclesiae: History, Theology, and Consequences,’ *Marian Studies* 66 (2015): 1-53; Gloria Falcao Dodd, *The Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Grace: History and Theology of the Movement for a Dogmatic Definition from 1896 to 1964*, New Bedford MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2012.

¹³ Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, trans. Sebastian Bullough, New York: Pantheon Books, 1961, 3.

On 18 November 1964, the day of the final vote on the Marian treatise, Pope Paul VI made an unexpected move, announcing his intention to close the session 'by joyfully bestowing on our Lady the title due to her: Mother of the Church'.¹⁴ The meaning and validity of the title '*Mater Ecclesiae*' is generally undisputed; we find an allusion to it in St. Ambrose's writings and more numerous references to it in medieval sources.¹⁵ The title itself gained traction in the mid-twentieth century with its rediscovery by Hugo Rahner and his work of Marian *ressourcement*.¹⁶

However, Pope Paul VI's pronouncement contributed to the dismay of many Council fathers. A large number considered it to be lacking in ecumenical sensitivity. Moreover, the pronouncement followed a bombshell previously dropped in what became known as the events of the 'Black Week' closing the Council's contentious third session. The vote on the document on religious liberty, another heated topic, had been postponed until the next session, against the will of the majority, and the Council's revival of the notion of episcopal collegiality had seemingly been intercepted with the *nota praevia* that was appended to the text *De Ecclesia* by an unnamed 'high authority' in order to appease the minority group. Discussion of collegiality and hierarchical communion had been the bone of contention, and many of the conciliar fathers felt that the power of the bishops had been undermined by the Pope's intervention. Furthermore, his proclamation of Mary as *Mater Ecclesiae* was also seen as an assertion of his authority, exercised apart from the college of Bishops gathered at the Council and contrary to the Council's explicit decision to refrain from defining new Marian titles. Moreover, this tension between the Pope and the episcopal college mirrored the tension of the Christotypical and Ecclesiotypical views. The former focused on Christ and his vicar, and the latter focused on the episcopal college and synodal communion. Having revived the notion of episcopal collegiality, the Council also had to hammer out the relationship of the Pope to the college of bishops, and this was one of the most protracted deliberations of the Council.

¹⁴ Stacpoole, *Mary and the Churches*, 93.

¹⁵ Stacpoole, *Mary and the Churches*, 93; Roten, 'Mater Ecclesiae', 4 n3.

¹⁶ See Hugo Rahner, *Mater Ecclesia - Lobpreis der Kirche aus dem ersten Jahrtausend*, Köln: Einsiedeln, 1944, and *Maria und die Kirche*, Innsbruck: Marianischer Verlag, 1951.

Discussion of the Marian dimension of the Church was unwittingly at the heart of these debates, and the Pope's announcement of a formal Marian title seemed to endorse the Christotypical Mariology which the Council had labored so intensely to moderate in its decision to embrace a more ecclesiotypical approach integrating the Marian treatise in the treatise on the Church. According to Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, in his contribution to Alberigo's five-volume study of *The History of Vatican II*, the Council fathers perceived the decision to conceive Mary as simultaneously a member and yet also mother of the Church as also mirroring the role of the pope as both belonging within and yet, in some sense, positioned above the episcopal college.¹⁷ The Council's careful and even excessive caution in its articulation – maintaining papal primacy while simultaneously affirming episcopal collegiality – is evident throughout the third chapter of *Lumen Gentium* on the hierarchical structure of the Church and is especially conspicuous in the *nota praevia*.¹⁸ Had the Council Fathers chosen to present its Mariology in a separate treatise, they would have unwittingly reinforced the idea that Mary stands above and *apart from* the Church, and by analogous extension, emphasized the Pope's authority as reigning autonomously and independently of the College of Bishops as well. On the other hand, the integration of the Marian treatise *within* the Council's treatment of the Church places her squarely within the Church as its member while still acknowledging her distinct, divine privileges as its mother.

Pope Paul's proclamation of Mary as 'Mother of the Church' within this framework actually underscores Mary's endowment with special graces as, in fact, not apart from but in

¹⁷ Luis Cardinal Tagle, 'The Black Week' of Vatican II, in Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *The History of Vatican II*, Vol. IV, Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2005, 448. See also Charles Moeller, 'History of *Lumen Gentium*'s Structure and Ideas', 141; Moeller describes the controversy: 'Two positions confronted each other. Both curiously intervened in the same way regarding the pope and the Blessed Virgin. One group considered the pope as superior to and a part of the Episcopal college, like the head of a body. The other considered him as superior to but apart from the college, and felt that papal primacy was diminished, run down, compromised in the other position ... The same thing happened when the question of the Virgin Mary came up: some saw in her an eminent and singular member of the Church, the summit of its communion with Christ; the others tended to place her in opposition to the rest of the Church, sometimes even going to the point of considering her as predestined with Christ independently of the Church and prior to it, endowed with a grace specifically different from the others.'

¹⁸ See Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, DH 4356-4357. In paragraphs three and four of the *Nota explicative praevia*, the Council locates the authority of the Pope *within* the college of bishops *as its head*. This presupposes an enduring communion – both explicitly or implicitly – between the Roman Pontiff and the college. Similarly, the college of bishops has no authority of its own apart from communion with its head. For a survey of the main issues of the relationship of papal primacy and episcopal collegiality, see Richard Gaillardetz and Catherine Clifford, *Keys to the Council. Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012, 124-126.

service to the Church. By analogous extension, the Office of Peter also exists, not as an authority apart from the College of Bishops, but *intrinsic* to it and in its service. This is but one example of how the Council's Marian thought had a bearing on its understanding of the relationship of papal primacy to episcopal collegiality.

In his reflections 'On the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council' in 2005, Pope (emeritus) Benedict XVI highlights this convergence in the Council's Mariology with its ecclesiology. He states that Pope Paul VI's promulgation of the Marian title was made 'with the intention to elucidate the internal structure of the Church developed at Vatican II'.¹⁹ This internal structure is indeed elucidated in the light of Mary's fruitfulness in bearing forth the Word Incarnate as well as the life of grace in those who believe in her Son. Moving beyond the polemics of the Council, we can explore the confluence of the Council's sacramental ecclesiology with its teaching on Mary as *Mediatrix*.

Maternal Mediation

At the heart of the Council's Mariology is the reality of Mary as *Mediatrix*.²⁰ The third section of chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium*, 'On the Blessed Virgin and the Church', describes the Blessed Virgin as 'invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and *Mediatrix*' (LG 62). With this comes the affirmation that: 'There is but one Mediator [Jesus Christ, and] ... the maternal duty of Mary toward men in no wise obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power' (LG 60). The Council teaches emphatically that Mary's maternal mediation 'flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it.... In no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ' (LG 60).²¹ Mary's efficacious mediation is derived from her divine motherhood: God has established her as

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, 'Homily on the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council,' Rome, *Capella papale*, 8 December 2005; as quoted in Roten, 'Mater Ecclesiae', 20-21.

²⁰ While the proponents of the Christotypical perspective advocated the pronouncement of new titles to honor Mary, many of the council Fathers expressed concern that a triumphalistic Mariology would deepen the ecumenical divide. To achieve a compromise, the Council including the title of *Mediatrix* within its text but alongside the other titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, and Adjutrix (in LG 62).

²¹ The Constitution reiterates in LG 62 that Mary's maternal care 'is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator.'



mother of his Son, the principle of grace, and she is thus 'our mother in the order of grace' (LG 61). Mary's maternal mediation as *Mater Ecclesiae* flows directly from her role as *Mater Christi*.

A mother's relation to her children is principally mediatory rather than causal in essence. God alone is the Creator of life, and he invites human beings to partake in his creative powers in procreative, conjugal union. The new life which comes into existence at the moment of conception is mediated by the loving union of the mother and father, with God alone as the author. So too, Mary's role as *Mediatrix* is derived from her participation in God's superabundant love and mercy shown forth in the divine plan of salvation. Mary is *Mediatrix* insofar as she is mother to Jesus Christ, the One Mediator of Redemption. Furthermore, as an eminent virgin bride and mother, she mediates this mysterious reality to the Church who is also the virgin bride of Christ and mother to all Christians. This theology of Mary's maternal mediation (i.e. her divine motherhood toward Christ and her spiritual motherhood to all members of the Church) stands at the heart of the Council's ecclesiology.

Sacramentality and *Mediatrix*

What is the ecclesiological vision of *Lumen Gentium* but one of sacramentality? The Constitution begins with the words: '*Lumen gentium cum sit Christus*'. Christ is the primordial sacrament of God and the light to the nations; He alone is the way to the Father. The Church, by extension, is the sacrament of Christ, and the seven sacraments, per se, are the channels of grace which flow from Christ's Body. When the Council took up the task of examining the Church's inner essence and the meaning of her mission in the world, it revived this sacramental understanding of the Church Fathers who spoke of the Church as the *mysterium lunae*; like a refulgent moon, the Church does not possess her own splendor, but rather, is the medium which reflects the light of Christ shines for the nations. In Christ, the Church 'is like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race' (LG 1; see also LG 9 and 48).

Vatican II's sacramental ecclesiology, which has also been identified as an ecclesiology of communion,²² comes to a climax in the Council's Mariology. As we have said, Mary's unique role in the economy of salvation is to be the mother of Christ; she mediates Christ to us and becomes also 'our mother in the order of grace' (LG 61). Like the efficacy of the seven sacraments, Mary's salvific influence 'flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, and depends entirely on it' (LG 60).²³ Moreover, she is not the source of the preeminent graces which overflow her being. Rather, like the Church, she mirrors and magnifies the glory of God, from whom she has received every blessing. The Council teaches that the resplendent mysteries of Mary's life originate 'not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure' (LG 60). God takes pleasure in achieving human salvation through the collaboration of the Blessed Mother. So too, the Church's mission is to be a graced collaborator in God's plan of salvation, in Mary's likeness.

The Second Vatican Council expounded a view of *Mater Ecclesiae* and *Mediatrix* which draws a direct connection between Our Lady and the nature and mission of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sacramentality – a concept rooted in the heart of Catholicism and in the mystery of the Incarnation – exemplifies the dynamics of mediation *par excellence*. The fruit of the earth and the work of human hands can truly be offered to God, and is indeed pleasing to him – not out of any divine necessity, but merely out of God's gracious design. In contrast to theologies of *sola fide* in which there is no room for human cooperation, the Council holds firmly to the dynamics of sacramentality in which grace builds on nature; the supernatural passes through the natural; and God engages human freedom in his work of Redemption. In the words of St. Augustine: 'God created us without us; but he does not will to save us without us'.²⁴

Mediation – be it maternal or sacramental – constitutes the framework and the inner dynamic of our salvation. Sacramental graces come through visible signs. Just as Christ's

²² The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops' 1985 document, *Communio Notio*, 'Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion', available online at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communio-notio_en.html.

²³ The Council was careful to lay out with precision the distinction that Christ is the sole Mediator and that the 'maternal duty of Mary toward men in no wise obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ' (LG 60).

²⁴ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 169, 11,13 (PL 38.923).



presence is mediated through the consecrated host, the Blessed Virgin Mary maternally mediates Christ to us. She is the epitome of human collaboration with grace, a collaboration understood as *perfect receptivity* to the divine. She receives the Word of God so perfectly that the Word becomes flesh within her. She is truly the Mother of God and she becomes also, in faith, mother to all believers in the mediation of grace.

The Church's own motherhood is thus a real participation in Mary's spiritual maternity. When the Church acts as a mother giving birth to Christians from the womb of the baptismal font, nurtures them with the food of the Eucharist, and tends to their wounds in the sacrament of reconciliation, she fulfills her mission as the sacrament of salvation by sharing in the maternity of Mary who first gave life to Christ. In this light, the Council's sacramental understanding of the Church helps explain why the final chapter on Mary is truly the apex and culmination of the Church's own self-understanding. In Mary, the Church recognizes her exquisite feminine form and dignity as virgin bride and mother.

Conclusion

Pope Benedict XVI has stated that: 'Only if this correlation [of the Council's Marian thought and its ecclesiology] is grasped, can one correctly grasp the image of the Church which the Council wished to portray.'²⁵ While it is unfortunate that little attention has been paid to the final chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, the treasures that chapter holds are still there, awaiting a more robust reception so that the Council's image of the Church may be correctly grasped and its teaching on Mary as Mother and *Mediatrix* might shine forth with new light and fresh application. Returning to Zizioulas' statement that it should be the work of 'Vatican III to push the notion of communion to its ontological conclusions', we can begin to appreciate that Mary is the 'Church in person and as a person'.²⁶ She is a being of communion, and to be Church is to live out ecclesial communion as Marian. Moreover, the notion of *communio* pushed to its 'ontological conclusion' could not be something other than personalistic. An ecclesiology of communion, at the end of the day, must be rooted in Trinitarian communion

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005, 150.

²⁶ Ratzinger, *Mary the Church at the Source*, 30.

and must focus on the person of Christ. Mary embodies this Spirit-led focus: She is a beloved daughter of God the Father, a faith-filled mother to the Son, and the loving spouse of the Holy Spirit. Her relation to the Church flows from her union with the Triune God and her maternal intimacy with Jesus, to whom she always leads us.

Pope Saint John Paul II highlighted the Mary-Church relationship in its importance for communion ecclesiology in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*: 'In her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and everyone in the Church, and *embraces each and everyone through the Church*. In this sense, Mary Mother of the Church is also the Church's model.'²⁷ In any family, the role of the mother is to nurture, discipline, reconcile differences, and unite; she draws her family together in love. So too in the ecclesial family. Amongst the many images that *Lumen Gentium* employs to describe the mystery of the Church, its final and climactic chapter offers neither a definition nor some conceptual ideal, but rather, a person – a tender mother – who is a real agent of communion. She is the perfect Daughter Zion who bridges the old and new covenants; the immaculate mother and a compassionate sister to all the redeemed. As *Mater Ecclesiae* and *Mediatrix* of grace, she is also the best explanation for the Church as the communion of the people of God, exemplifying that maternal dimension by which the Church gives and nurtures a life of grace in all the faithful in and through her sacramental ministry.

Only by being Marian, can we become Church. At its very beginning the Church was not made, but given birth. She existed in the soul of Mary from the moment she uttered her *fiat*. This is the most profound will of the Council: that the Church should be awakened in our souls. Mary shows us the way.²⁸

²⁷ Pope Saint John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater* 1987, §47.

²⁸ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 'Ecclesiology of Vatican II', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 Jan 2002; accessed from <http://www.ewtn.com/library/curiacdfecv2.htm>.