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**Title:** **Ratzinger's Development of Vatican II's Text on Mary: Mary as Church in Person and Human Being as Person**

**Abstract**

Sixty years after the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council's document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), Ratzinger's reflections on the chapter on Mary that was included in it remains a fresh and important contribution to Mary in the life of the Church. Ratzinger returned to the Council's text on Mary to build his clarification of Mary's role and place in Christian faith and theology and of appropriate veneration of Mary. The paper first explores Ratzinger's reflections on Mary before and during Vatican II and then considers the three phases of his clarification and development of the Council's text on Mary. To conclude the paper outlines how Ratzinger's own development of the conciliar text on Mary can itself be further developed.

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**Introduction**

Joseph Ratzinger could not be described as a Marian pope akin to Saint John Paul II. He can and should, however, be viewed as an important interpreter of Vatican II's text on Mary.[1] Presenting a rich theological interpretation of Mary, Ratzinger offers profound insights pertaining to the whole of theology. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the core elements of Ratzinger's post-conciliar thought on Mary and its importance for his overall corpus. The aim is to establish the foundation stones laid by Ratzinger in the post-conciliar period, which Christian scholars should use in a collaborative effort to develop the fuller treatise on Mary that he thought necessary. To properly contextualise Ratzinger's development of Vatican II's text on Mary, his reflections on the Council's struggles surrounding that text are considered ahead of a discussion of the three phases of Ratzinger's clarification and development thereof.[2] Finally, consideration is given to how Ratzinger's contribution itself can be further developed, as well as to the immediate next steps for building that fuller treatise on Mary. Ratzinger's writings on the women of the Bible, which appear throughout his corpus, are not limited to the texts considered here. Also not considered here are his reflections on Mary presented during his papacy.

Ratzinger's development of the conciliar text on Mary is not an endpoint. It is deliberately intended to lay foundations for a broader treatise on Mary emanating from Vatican II's reorientation of reflection upon Mary the Mother of God as type of the Church, whereby what is said of Mary is said of the Church, and vice versa. In doing this, Ratzinger fruitfully developed not just the Council's text on Mary, but also that of *Dei Verbum*, the Council's document on Divine Revelation. It can be seen that Ratzinger's thought on Mary evolved from a somewhat hostile view of the Marian movement before and during Vatican II to an embrace of the Council's Church-centred Mary in the post-conciliar period. In 1985, he described the criticality of Mary for Christianity and, hence, the importance of the reset rendered by the conciliar text on Mary, as follows: 'If the place occupied by Mary has been essential to the equilibrium of the faith, today it is urgent, as in few other epochs of Church history, to rediscover that place'.[3] In accepting that his post-conciliar tone on Mary resembled a conversion, Ratzinger said, 'Yes . . . it is necessary to go back to Mary if we want to return to that "truth about Jesus Christ", "truth about the Church" and "truth about man".'[4]

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[1] This paper develops themes in my book *Innovation within Tradition: Joseph Ratzinger and Reading the Women of Scripture*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015; also see my papers 'Ecumenical Dimensions and Potential of Vatican II's Statement on Mary', *Word & World* 44. 1, 2024, 85-98; and 'New Directions in Mariology within Fundamental Theology: Mary, Mother of God, Theotokos, Type of the Church, Illuminator of the Fullness of Christian Faith and Theology', *Theology* 119.3, 2016, 185–192.

[2] On the development of the text on Mary at Vatican II see: Fredrick M. Jelly, 'The Theological Context of and Introduction to Chapter 8 of Lumen Gentium', *Marian Studies* 37, 1986, 43-73.

[3] Joseph Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985, 104-109.

[4] Ibid 105-106.

Ratzinger's post-conciliar development of the text on Mary sought to clarify Mary's role and place in Christian faith and theology, along with appropriate devotion to her. Thus, Ratzinger became a Marian theologian who richly explicated the Marian thought of Vatican II.[5] This should not come as a surprise given his personal connection with the apparitions at Lourdes and St. Bernadette, who died on 16 April 1879. Ratzinger was born on 16 April 1927, and he announced his resignation from the papacy on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on 11 February 2013.

## Ratzinger on Mary Before and During the Council

Ratzinger's theological concern before and during Vatican II was to remove what he saw as unhelpful superfluous aspects of neo-scholasticism that blocked the faithful from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. At this time, Ratzinger was influenced by the Liturgical movement's *Solus Christus* emphasis and by ecumenical concerns that saw the Marian movement as problematic. His theological work focused on revelation and ecclesiology. The equation of the God of the Philosophers and the God of Jesus Christ was a central tenet of his thought, along with an understanding of Jesus aligned to Karl Barth, which understood that 'The person of Jesus *is* his teaching, and his teaching is he himself'.[6] Through Vatican II's pivot to the world, Ratzinger sought constructive engagement with the world, hoping to offer the world the gift of the person of Jesus Christ. In his reflections on Mary, he emphasised the practical nature and meaning of her faith. In a 1962 article, he compared Mary and Elizabeth's faith reaction to the Annunciation and Incarnation with Zachariah's lack of belief in the pronouncement of Elizabeth's pregnancy.[7] Ratzinger's 'faith encounter' approach informed his view of the documents issued by the Preparatory Theological Commission ahead of the Council, which he saw as jeopardising the Council's ability to renew Catholic Christianity, breathe new life into ecumenical dialogue, and redefine the Church's relationship with the world.

Ratzinger, who was an advisor to one of the leading German cardinals at the Council (Josef Frings), described the prepared Council documents as dependent upon scholastic theology: with limited reference to the 'biblical and patristic renewal of the last decades … they reflected more the thought of scholars than that of shepherds'.[8] With regard to the June 1962 draft text on Mary, *On the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Humans*, Ratzinger advised Frings that the text should be abandoned for ecumenical reasons: 'No new wealth

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[5] On Ratzinger's Mariology, see also Martin Ifeanyi Onuoho, *Mary, Daughter Zion. An Introduction to the Mariology of Joseph Ratzinger* (Benedict XVI), Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021 and *Actio Divina: The Marian Mystery of the Church in the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI),* Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022; and Tim Perry, '"Behold the Handmaid of the Lord": Joseph Ratzinger on Mary,' in T. Perry (ed), *The Theology of Benedict XVI: A Protestant Appreciation*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019, 118–135.

[6] Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2nd edn, 2004, 204-205.

[7] Joseph Ratzinger, 'Maria Heimsuchung. Eine Homilie', *Bibel und Leben* 3, 1962, 138–40.

[8] Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927 – 1977*, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997, 121.

will be given to Catholics which they did not already have. But a new obstacle will be set up for outsiders (especially the Orthodox).' He proposed adding a prayer addressed to Mary for Christian unity at the end of the document on the Church, while avoiding terms without dogmatic foundation.[9] One of the Council Fathers' first actions was to reject the preparatory document on Revelation (20-21 November 1962), which Ratzinger was central to orchestrating, setting the tone for the Council's remaining documents, including the text on Mary.[10] After significant debate, the Council Fathers voted in the second session (1963) to include the text on Mary in the document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, rather than having a standalone document dedicated solely to Mary.

In reflecting on Vatican II, Ratzinger contended that the first half of the Council can only be understood through the struggles between the Liturgical movement—in alignment with the Biblical and Ecumenical movements—and the Marian movement. The Marian movement's roots, Ratzinger argued, lay in mid-nineteenth century Marian apparitions and were influenced by the Middle Ages and modernity. Here, Ratzinger is referring to the speculative Mariology of the neo- and Baroque scholastics, some of whom argued for Mary's Co-Redemption. Its influence reached its zenith during the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–58). The Marian movement's slogan, 'through Mary to Jesus', seemed to Ratzinger to obscure the Trinitarian approach of 'through Christ to the Father'; while its 'basic core' was healthy, aspects appeared dubious. The Liturgical movement, which collaborated with the Ecumenical and Biblical movements, was described by Ratzinger as theocentric, defined by a return to the sources of Scripture and the early forms of Church prayers; it saw itself as 'objective' and sacramental, finding endorsement from Pius XII through his encyclicals on the Church and the liturgy. An important aspect of this struggle in the post conciliar period, in Ratzinger's view, was the misunderstanding of Tradition. Biblicism, or the historicism of modern biblical scholarship, interpreted Scripture in terms of its sufficiency, in which the original or oldest elements are deemed normative and where not only the patristic tradition but all subsequent developments are deemed inferior as if part of a process of decline from the original. The Church, Ratzinger insisted, is 'alive and capable of development at all times', and there is a dynamism to faith that is 'continually unfolding'. In his assessment, historicism led to modernism and to home-made experiments that tried to fill the gap felt in the present as a result of faith being seen as something of the past. During this period of the Council, the right relationship between these two moments was worked through, resulting in what Ratzinger called a 'fruitful unity – without simply eliminating their tension'.[11]

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[9] Peter Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life. Vol.1: Youth in Nazi Germany to the Second Vatican Council 1927 – 1965*, trans. *Dinah Livingstone,* London: Bloomsburg, 2020, 379. Quote translated from Trippen (ed), *Kardinal Josef Frings auf dem Zweiten Vaticanum*.

[10] Ibid 322-463, 382-407.

[11] Joseph Ratzinger, 'On the Position of Mariology and Marian Spirituality within the Totality of Faith and Theology', trans. Graham Harrison, in Helmut Moll (ed), *The Church and Women: A Compendium*, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988, 69-71. Also see Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John McDermott SJ, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983, 38. Originally published in German in 1977.

Nevertheless, at the time of the Council, Ratzinger was highly critical of the Marian movement's contributions to the text on Mary, arguing that the Council Fathers 'completely misunderstood the actual state' of Mariology. The discussion, he said,

> often moved on a very mediocre level and at times scarcely rose to the level of the average devotional treatise. St Joseph and the rosary, dedication to Mary and the devotion to the heart of Mary, the title 'Mother of the Church' and the search for other titles were favorite topics of the talks, which did greater credit to the piety than the theological acumen of the bishops who delivered them.[12]

As will be seen, Ratzinger would later better appreciate what he tersely dismissed in 1964. In his contemporaneous commentaries on the Council sessions, Ratzinger insisted that it was not the intent to 'slowly dismantle Marian piety' so as to align Catholic Mariology with Protestantism. It did, however, seek to take onboard the criticisms of Protestant theology regarding speculative theology 'unmindful of scripture'. The final text on Mary, he maintained, took 'a sober and definite stand on the basis of biblical testimony'.[13] Biblical inquiry replaced speculative theology such that Mary was interpreted through faith and the events of salvation history. Ratzinger contended that the approved text on Mary drastically improved the previous Mariological situation and 'may turn out to be extremely significant'.[14] As with the rejection of the prepared schema on Revelation, John XXIII was essential to ensuring that a Scriptural Mary was included in the text.[15]

In his contemporaneous commentaries on the Council, Ratzinger called the integration of the text on Mary into the document on the Church an 'explicitly ecumenical decision' with profoundly important implications, particularly for Protestants.[16] He believed that it opened the door to mutual understanding about Mary among Christians.[17] Based on the Scriptural Mariology included in the text, which had displaced the previously dominant speculative Mariology, Ratzinger argued, the temporal Church was better understood to 'encompass the heavenly Church'. Underscoring the eschatological and spiritual dimensions, this reflects the reality that Christian liturgy is included in the cosmic liturgy, 'where all the world and all the saints adore God'. Mary thus stood with and among humanity before the Lord, rather than with the Lord before us. This standing reflects her role 'as a representative faithful Christian in the world'.[18] Ratzinger noted that the idea of Mary as 'Co-Redemptrix' and as 'Mediatrix of all graces' was removed from the text, while an acknowledgement was retained that Mary had been referred to as Mediatrix among other titles. This later title, he

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[12] Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. Gerard C. Thormann, New York: Paulist, 1966, 141-142.

[13] Ibid 142-143.

[14] Ibid 140-143.

[15] Ibid 48; Joseph Ratzinger, 'Das Problem der Mariologie', *Theologische Revue* 2.61, 1965, 74–82.

[16] Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life*, 444.

[17] Ratzinger, *Highlights of Vatican II*, 95-96.

[18] Ibid 95-96.

argued, was very different to calling Mary Mediatrix of All Graces. Moreover, he contended that the Council's text on Mary reopened the question of Mary's mediating role in grace, giving it new direction.[19] This term would be central to his reading of John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (1988).

At the time of its promulgation in November 1964, Ratzinger argued that the Council's integration of the text on Mary into the document on the Church 'shed some light on the mystery of the Church'. The core elements of Ratzinger's post-conciliar reflections on Chapter Eight of *Lumen Gentium* were outlined in his commentary on the Council's third session, with four aspects: First, Mary is the humble servant whom God 'exalted in her humility'. Second, she epitomises the powerless through whom God's grace accomplishes its purpose. Third, Mary personifies the Church, moving through history as a humble servant, illustrating 'the mystery of God's promise and proximity'. Fourth, Mary represents the Church rooted in Israel, tirelessly journeying through history, carrying the hope of the world.[20] Reflecting in 2000 on the inclusion of the text on Mary in the document on the Church, Ratzinger underscored the importance of the patristic renewal in the decades prior to the Council—particularly its understanding of Mary as type of the Church—to the Council's text on Mary:

> The rediscovery of the inter-changeability between Mary and the Church, the personification of the Church in Mary and the universal dimension acquired by Mary in the Church, is one of the most important theological rediscoveries of the twentieth century.[21]

Ratzinger credits Hugo Rahner, Alois Muller, Karl Delahaye, Otto Semmelroth, and René Laurentin with this crucial rediscovery of Mary as type of the Church, meaning that what is said of the Church is said of Mary, and vice versa.[22]

The text on Mary was written, according to Ratzinger, to correspond to the first four chapters of *Lumen Gentium* on the Church's structure. Thus, the energies of the Liturgical, Ecumenical, and Biblical movements were balanced with those of the Marian movement. What happened in practice, he noted, was unintended: Mariology became absorbed by ecclesiology, leading to a substantial decline in Marian devotion. Any reconsideration of Vatican II's text on Mary, in Ratzinger's view, must return to the original intent of its inclusion in *Lumen Gentium*.[23] The importance of the inclusion of the text on Mary in the document on the Church, for Ratzinger, is that it ensures that the Church is understood as a person and not merely an institution:

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[19] Ibid 194-195, fn 1.
[20] Ibid 94-96.
[21] Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002, 353.
[22] Ratzinger, 'On the Position of Mariology'', 70.
[23] Ibid 71.

> She is a woman; she is a mother. She is alive … We cannot make Church; we must be Church. And we are Church, and Church is in us only insofar as faith shapes our being, above and beyond anything we do. Only in Marian being do we become Church. At the origins, too, Church was not made but born. She was born when the fiat was awakened in Mary's soul. That is the most profound desire of the Council: that the Church might awaken in our souls. Mary shows us the way.[24]

*Lumen Gentium* speaks of 'Mother Church' on numerous occasions, but the title 'Mother of the Church' does not appear. Semmelroth explained the Council Fathers' rejection of the title 'Mary Mother of the Church' as being based on the fact that what that title means to express—Mary mother of the faithful—is unclear and risks misunderstanding, and that ultimately Mary is first and foremost the type of the Church. Mary as type of the Church, Semmelroth said, is 'a very ancient tradition', first explicitly recorded by St. Ambrose, and which the Council sought to re-establish for pastoral and theological reflection on Mary.[25] When it became clear that Paul VI intended to declare Mary Mother of the Church, Ratzinger authored a letter to him on behalf of several German cardinals, in a last-ditch attempt to prevent it. The letter noted that there was a danger the title could be understood of the Church as an institution, and that neither the Father, Son, nor Holy Spirit is called Father of the Church, *Pater Ecclesiae*; it also requested that the title Maria *Mater Ecclesiae* be combined with *Mater fidelium* (mother of the faithful) 'and be interpreted in that sense'.[26] Ratzinger's effort bore no fruit. Paul VI, a successor of St. Ambrose as Bishop of Milan, declared Mary 'Mother of the Church'. In his later reflections on Mary at Vatican II, Ratzinger came to reconcile himself with this title for Mary, seeing 'Mother of the Church' primarily as a theological statement. Her motherhood of the Church is her ongoing 'Yes' to God, which was biological at the Incarnation but fundamentally theological in its ongoing hearing and keeping of God's word in the plan of salvation.

**Phase 1 of Ratzinger's Post-Conciliar Reflection on Mary: Essential Components of Mariology**

In the post-conciliar period, Ratzinger actively engaged in efforts to interpret the Council based on the contents of its documents, which later became a call to return to those documents. Mary and Mariology were not initially critical aspects of that task for him— partially because there were bigger issues to address, but also because the crucial issue for Ratzinger had been addressed: Mary was to be understood through the testimony of

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[24] Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council', *Church Ecumenism & Politics: New Endeavours in Ecclesiology,* trans. Michael Miller et al., San Francisco; Ignatius Press, 2008, 28.

[25] Otto Semmelroth, 'Chapter VIII-The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church', in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, in Herbert Vorgrimler (ed), Volume I, New York: Herder & Herder, 1967, 292.

[26] Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life*, 455.

Scripture as type of the Church and interpreted *in* the mystery of Christ and the Church. The potential of the text on Mary lay dormant in Ratzinger's work, emerging in the mid-1970s as an element of his response to multiple challenges to what he called the correct interpretation of the Council, including ongoing manifestation of various *Solus Christus* approaches, the crisis of biblical interpretation in the form of the historical-critical method, liberation theology, and feminist theology. Responding to these challenges led Ratzinger to engage with the Council's text on Mary, leading to a greater appreciation for its importance to theology as a whole. In that response, he developed the initial lines of thought contained in his contemporaneous commentaries on the Council. Although he noted that Mary is marginal to the Gospel tradition, seen at the beginning and the end, Ratzinger also demonstrated her indispensability for Christian understanding of God, the Church, and humanity. In other words, Mary is required for the correct understanding of creation and grace, for anthropology, ecclesiology, Christology, and soteriology. Importantly, Ratzinger's thought about Mary is predicated on a certain approach to biblical interpretation wherein the unity of the Bible is understood in light of Christ, and where typology—the interpretation of Old Testament figures as fulfilled in the New—is essential. Moreover, he trusts that the New Testament presentation of the Jesus of faith is the historical Jesus. The Gospels, in Ratzinger's understanding, theologically interpret the witness of and testimony to Jesus and the early Church from those with knowledge of the events, words, and deeds.[27] The God of Jesus Christ is the *Creator Spiritus* who has power over matter.

While he draws on a multitude of resources from the pre-Council period and its immediate aftermath, synthesising them into a coherent whole, three main influences can be identified in Ratzinger's developing thought on Mary. As always, this manifests as engagement with those influences, which he develops and refines rather than simply appropriating. This is clearly seen in relation to Hans Urs von Balthasar's work on personalisation as 'constitutive of the New Testament's figure of the Covenant'. One of Balthasar's central theses in this regard was the Church as personally concretised in Mary.[28] Whereas Balthasar emphasised the feminine aspect in contrast to the masculine, Ratzinger shaped this 'personalisation' through his own development of the theological notion of person, where the relational is central to understanding both God and humanity. René Laurentin and Stanislas Lyonnet's work on Luke's infancy narrative forms a stable source from which Ratzinger draws to develop his reflection on Mary, including the third volume of his *Jesus of Nazareth*, which addresses the Infancy Narratives (2012).[29] Laurentin and Lyonnet's work is an essential element of his description of Mary as person, who offers God a place to dwell. In relation to the Old Testament theology of woman, Ratzinger draws on Louis Bouyer's work.[30]

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[27] Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Adrian J. Walker, London: Bloomsbury, 2007, xi-xxiv.

[28] Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, 28, fn 14.

[29] For an overview of Laurentin's mature work, see René Laurentin, *Mary in Scripture, Liturgy, and the Catholic Tradition*, trans. Sean O'Brien, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014.

[30] Louis Bouyer, *Women in the Church*, trans. Marilyn Teichert, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1979.

The impact on Marian piety of the inclusion of the text on Mary in the document on the Church catalysed the first phase of Ratzinger's contribution in the mid-to-late 1970s. There are two key publications in this first phase: *Daughter Zion*, and *On the Position of Mariology and Marian Spirituality within the Totality of Faith and the Church*. *Daughter Zion*, published in 1977 [German] and 1983 [English], is a collection of three lectures by Ratzinger from 1975, aiming to look at the whole basis of the Church's understanding of Mary and make apparent the 'meaningful arrangement of individual elements'. Ratzinger's intent in these lectures was threefold: to underscore the critical elements of Mary for Christianity, to detail 'the layer of meaning' that should provide the basis of a fuller treatise, and to demonstrate that Mariology is not a 'scaled-down' Christology where Mary is somehow semi-divine and to be worshipped, nor is she an infiltration or 'echo' from Egyptian or Greek religions that should be tolerated, as if the Church should 'leave the Romans their Madonnas'.[31] At the core of the layer of meaning Ratzinger sought to emphasise is Mary as the link between the Old and New Testaments. Mariology in the Gospels, he says, is 'woven entirely out of the Old Testament's faith'. Where Christ brings 'the marked distinction and break', Mary, through her silence and faith, 'incarnates the continuity realised in the poor of Israel … The centre of the Magnificat contains simultaneously the centre of the biblical theology of the people of God'.[32] He demonstrated that all Marian piety is drawn from the Old Testament's theology of woman—an essential element of God's covenant with Israel. This element, in his view, had not been sufficiently highlighted, resulting in the idea that women had no role in the faith of Israel—the consequence being that the Marian element in the Church and New Testament could not be rightly perceived or understood. Yes, the prophets waged a battle against fertility cults, but that enabled the theology, or language of God, to include women. The image of marriage corresponds to Israel's belief in God and God's relationship with humanity, male and female.[33]

Ratzinger's efforts to lay foundation stones for a broader treatise on Mary should be understood as reorienting neo- and Baroque scholastic theology from basing Mariology upon the principle of the Divine Motherhood, broadening it so that both Mary as type of the Church and the women of the Old Testament are central elements. Thus, Mary, the Mother of God, is placed, as she was by the Council, in the mystery of Christ and the Church. The Marian dogmas, which he describes as historical (Mary's Motherhood and Virginity) and theological (Mary's Immaculate Conception and Bodily Assumption), are then seen to be reasonable, predicated as they are upon the unity of the Bible and typology. Ratzinger insists that the Virgin Motherhood of Mary is about faith in God the *Creator Spiritus*; acceptance or rejection of this is not historical criticism but a worldview.[34] Mary as the personal concretisation of the Church means that what is ascribed to the Church by Scripture (Luke and John) and by the

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[31] Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, 7-11.
[32] Ibid 31-32.
[33] Ibid 13-15.
[34] Ibid 61.

Church Fathers—virgin, mother, *immaculata*—is ascribed to Mary, and vice versa. Ratzinger's description of Mary as person emerges from consideration of the Immaculate Conception, in which there are close parallels to his description of the theological notion of person in Christ—the phenomenon of complete relatedness.[35] The importance here is that, as Daughter Zion, Mary is a person in the fullest sense in terms of the human being. In relation to the Assumption, Ratzinger positions this as a theological statement about Mary. It is veneration or the highest degree of canonisation which is entirely distinct and different from Jesus's historical Resurrection. The Assumption is an eschatological formula stating that 'Mary stands for the Church itself, for *its* definitive state of salvation'.[36]

*On the Position of Mariology and Marian Spirituality within the Totality of Faith and the Church* was first published in 1979 as a pastoral letter of the German bishops, having been Ratzinger's homily at the opening of that year's spring conference.[37] The article takes up Paul VI's Apostolic Letter *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974), which he describes as a new approach in response to the unintended consequence of including the text on Mary in the document on the Church: a reduced role of Marian piety in Church life. This article adds additional clarification to his reading of Mary in *Daughter Zion*, with four aspects: First, the function of Mariology in theology is twofold. The Church personified by Mary is feminine, negating a masculine/activist structural sociological approach to the 'People of God': Mary 'liberated by grace … utters her "Fiat" and thus becomes the Bride and hence Body'.[38] In addition, Mary has always played a central, albeit implicit, role in the Church Fathers' explication of Christology and ecclesiology.[39] Mary represents humanity in the pairings of Bridegroom/Bride and Head/Body, although she surpasses both pairings, being her Son's Mother. Here, Ratzinger sees the function of the title 'Mother of the Church' that he disputed 15 years earlier.[40] Mary's motherhood is not simply biological. The Church understood Christ's relationship with his Mother as 'a theological reality from the very outset', excluding any biological/theological dichotomy:

> In a nutshell, this hermeneutics affirms that the salvation worked in history by the Triune God, the true centre of all history, is called "Christ and his Church" – Church signifying the union of the creature with its Lord in spousal love, thus fulfilling, along the path of faith, the creature's hope of divinisation.[41]

It is in this hermeneutic of Christ and Ecclesia that Mary's motherhood is theologically

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[35] Joseph Ratzinger, 'Retrieving the Tradition concerning the Notion of Person in Theology', trans. Michael Waldstein, *Communio* 17, 3, 1990, 439–454, 446, 450.

[36] Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, 76-77, 72-82.

[37] Ratzinger, 'On the Position of Mariology'.

[38] Ibid 72-73.

[39] Ibid 74.

[40] On his new approach to the title Mary, Mother of the Church, Ratzinger draws on W. Düring, *Maria – Mutter der Kirche: zur Geschichte und Theologie des neuen liturgischen Marientitels*, St Ottilien: EOS, 1979.

[41] Ratzinger, 'On the Position of Mariology', 75.

significant. What Church means is personally concretised in Mary. Mary's biological motherhood of the Son is 'theological reality in that it realises the most profound spiritual content of the Covenant which God wished to make with Israel'. This, Ratzinger argues, is shown in reading Luke 1:45 (Blessed is she who believed) in conjunction with Luke 11:27 (Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it). Mariology, understood through the hermeneutics of faith and the mystery of Christ and the Church, 'can never be merely mariology'.[42]

Third, Mary and the Mariology developed by Tradition demonstrate that salvation history is a history of God and a creation that God 'summoned and equipped' to 'respond to him in freedom'. Grace does not erode creation 'but is the definitive Yes to creation'. Mary is the prototype of creation, wherein freedom comes 'to its fulfilment in love'. Mary 'exemplifies saved and liberated mankind' in the 'physical specificity which is inseparable from the human being': '"the biological" is inseparable from the human, just as the human is inseparable from the "theological"'.[43] Fourth, Marian spirituality combines the incarnational, at the Annunciation and Pentecost, and the passion, at the Cross, as foretold in Simeon's passion (Lk. 2:35). Ratzinger insists that Marian spirituality must be a way for the faithful to journey along the mystery of salvation history. The task of Marian spirituality, for Ratzinger, is 'to awaken the heart and purify it for, through, and in faith'.[44]

## Phase 2 of Ratzinger's Post-Conciliar Reflection on Mary: The Marian Year

Phase two of Ratzinger's development of the conciliar text on Mary is set against the backdrop of his role as Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which he held from 1982 until becoming Pope on 19 April 2005. This phase commenced with the *Ratzinger Report* (1985), wherein he summarised the aforementioned Marian principles that he insisted are essential to the completion of the Catholic faith. Mary, for Ratzinger, is an example that every Christian should follow. In proclaiming the Magnificat, she demonstrates God's intent for every era: the overturning of the worldly orders of power and status by the marginal, outcast, and exiled.[45] In this interview, Ratzinger also contextualised Marian apparitions. Revelation is concluded, terminating in Jesus Christ, who is Revelation. As such, Ratzinger insisted that 'no apparition is indispensable to faith', although Marian apparitions do have a place in the development of the Church—to point to the insufficiency of cultures dominated by rationalism and positivism.[46] Again, close parallels with Laurentin's thought are evident in this reflection.[47]

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[42] Ibid 74-75.
[43] Ibid 70-73, 76-77.
[44] Ibid 78 – 79.
[45] Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 104-109.
[46] Ibid 111.
[47] René Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, trans. Luke Griffin, Veritas: Dublin, 1990.

The apex of Ratzinger's contribution to reflection on Vatican II's text on Mary was prompted by the Marian Year, which commenced at Pentecost on 7 June 1987 and concluded with the Feast of the Assumption, 15 August 1988, seeking 'to promote a new and more careful reading of what the Council said about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church.'[48] Ratzinger's contribution to this reading is presented in two articles that further elaborate his reflection on Mary: 'The Sign of the Woman' (1988), and '"You are full of grace": Elements of Biblical Devotion to Mary' (1989), given as an address in Loreto (7 March 1988). These articles should be read together with his articles on the human being, given his interpretation of Mary as the prototype of creation and representative of humanity: 'Man between Reproduction and Procreation' (1989), and 'Retrieving the Tradition concerning the Notion of Person in Theology'[49] (1973 [German] and 1990 [English]). Further elucidation on the meaning of creation, fall, and salvation of the human being is included in two works published in the mid-1990s: The first is *'In the Beginning . . .': A Catholic Understanding of Creation and the Fall*, a series of Lenten homilies given and published in German (1986) (later published in English (1995)).[50] Here, Ratzinger speaks of the creation of humanity, male and female, and how sin is a rejection of relationality and of our limited human nature. This relational Christian anthropology is further explicated in the 1996 article 'Truth and Freedom'. God's nature, he says, is to be 'entirely being-for (Father), being-from (Son), and being-with (Holy Spirit)'. The human being is God's image insofar as they follow this 'fundamental anthropological pattern'.[51]

In 'The Sign of the Woman', Ratzinger details the methodology and basic concepts of *Redemptoris Mater* in a personal capacity to facilitate a proper interpretation of the encyclical, which Ratzinger sets within the context of Vatican II's text on Mary. Two additional aspects of this article should be highlighted: First, he identifies a female line in the Bible, in parallel to and indispensable for its male line.[52] Ratzinger's concept refers to the line of women in the Bible and their meaning within salvation history. It is noteworthy that Divine Wisdom is included in the female line. Under the influence of the Liturgical movement, Ratzinger previously rejected the early Church's identification of Mary with Wisdom, before later changing his mind. He explained in *Daughter Zion* that he came to see identifying Wisdom solely with Christ as too narrow an approach, noting that in both Hebrew and Greek

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[48] John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 1987, 48. www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html

[49] Joseph Ratzinger, 'Man between Reproduction and Procreation', trans. Thomas A. Caldwell, S.J., *Communio* 16.2, 1989, 197–211; and Ratzinger, 'Retrieving the Tradition concerning the Notion of Person in Theology'.

[50] Joseph Ratzinger, *'In the Beginning . . .': A Catholic Understanding of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

[51] Joseph Ratzinger, 'Truth and Freedom', trans. Adrian Walker, *Communio* 23.1, 1996, 16–35, 28.

[52] Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Sign of the Woman', introduction to *Mary: God's Yes to Man: John Paul's Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Mater*, trans. Lothar Krauth, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988, 17–18; also published in Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Church at Source*, trans. Adrian Walker, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005. In the 2005 text, the word 'female' is replaced by 'feminine'. The English word 'female' is the appropriate word to describe the concept that Ratzinger is articulating, as he is speaking of the women of the Bible.

the word wisdom (*sophia*) is feminine. His thinking developed in the post-conciliar period such that he saw the idea of Wisdom as certainly integrated into Christology, but a 'remainder flows to Mary'.[53] In identifying the Bible's female line, Ratzinger extended the description of salvation history found in *Dei Verbum*, the Council's document on Revelation, which he significantly influenced.[54] There, in the description of salvation history, the only reference to the female is to 'our parents' and, hence, Eve.[55] Ratzinger subsequently completed, thereby correcting, this central Council document with a fuller description of salvation history with the female line. He deemed this necessary because only when Mary and the Church are present in theology can the unity of the biblical message of the Old and New Testaments be perceived, 'through which human beings become whole'.[56] The female line in the Bible, for Ratzinger, accomplishes the reading of the Bible from a Marian perspective, which is necessary to respond to the contemporary anthropological challenge.

Ratzinger highlights five concepts included in *Redemptoris Mater*. Here, consideration is given only to his emphasis on Mary's role being defined as mediation, accomplished in intercession. Ratzinger positions the encyclical's description of Mary's mediation as a 'linguistic shift' that reveals 'the new approach to Mariology chosen by the Pope' (John Paul II). As he reads *Redemptoris Mater*, Mary's mediation is the appropriate interpretation of her continuing role as against the titles of Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces—titles excluded from the encyclical, reflecting their exclusion from *Lumen Gentium*:[57] 'Mary dwells not just in the past or in the lofty spheres of heaven under God's immediate disposition; she is and remains present and real in this historical moment; she is a person acting here and now. Her life is not just a reality that lies behind us, nor above us, she precedes us'.[58] Parallels to Laurentin's approach are evident. Laurentin proposed the term 'presence' to describe Mary's continuing role in salvation, which he said differs from God's presence: the principle of Mary's presence is 'perceived by signs' and is 'an experience of proximity, influence, maternal support and assistance'.[59] Again, by placing Mary as Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church, Ratzinger eschews the too-narrow view that emanates from building Mariology solely upon the fundamental principle of Mary as Mother of God.

Mary's mediation, Ratzinger acknowledges, has not been 'thoroughly developed by the Magisterium's documents', arguing that the encyclical nonetheless deepens and

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[53] Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, 27.

[54] See Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life*, 356-463, 367-369, 388-407.

[55] *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum*, 1965, 3 and 4. www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html

[56] Ratzinger, 'The Sign of the Woman,' 19.

[57] Ibid 20. For an overview of the current state of the discussion on Mary as Co-Redemptrix, see Robert Fastiggi, 'Mary in the Work of Redemption', in Chris Maunder (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 303-319.

[58] Ibid 20-21.

[59] Laurentin, *Mary in Scripture, Liturgy, and the Catholic Tradition,* 138-166, 142.

substantiates this term. Christ's mediation is unique but inclusive, allowing forms of participation that include human mediation for persons in union with Him. While faith is received through Christian witness just as we are baptised by another, or as Ratzinger said is dependent on human mediation, it is insufficient to guarantee God's existence and presence. Mary's mediation surpasses ours while being dependent upon and subordinate to Christ's; it is unique, being maternal mediation related to Christ, 'who is always born anew into this world'. This mediation is based on Mary's biological motherhood, but it is more so theological, being ultimately based on Mary's forever-recurring response to God in hearing and keeping His Word; its true foundations involve her 'total being', predicated on her hearing, keeping, and doing His word. As seen in his 1979 article, this is the description that he presents of Mary as the Mother of the Church. Thus, his descriptions of Mary's mediation and Mary as Mother of the Church are interconnected, mutually informing one another. On the fortieth anniversary of the closing of the Council, Ratzinger, as Benedict XVI, described the title of Mother of the Church as 'deeply rooted in Tradition'.[60] Taking up the interpretation of Berengaud of Tours (early 12th century), he said that Christ the Head forms a single subject with the Body (the Church). As the Mother of the Head, Mary is also Mother of the Body. Totally united with Christ, she is totally ours and 'with him is given as a gift to us all'. Ultimately, the meaning of the Marian Year was that Mary shows the Church how to be Church in its truest form: only a reorientation towards the Sign of the Woman, towards a correctly defined female dimension of the Church, will bring about new openness to the Spirit's creative power and our transformation into the image and likeness of Christ, whose presence alone can give direction and hope to history.[61]

In the second article presented for the Marian Year, '"You are full of grace": Elements of Biblical Devotion to Mary', Ratzinger details the basis of devotion to Mary,[62] the importance of which is that proper Marian devotion serves proper glorification of God. Marian devotion, he argues, is commissioned and oriented in the Magnificat, where Mary declares that 'all generations will call me blessed!' He sees in Mary one of the people who make God known to humanity, 'through whom his own Being becomes apparent so much so that he comes to be "named" after them', enabling God to show His face as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Mary's name belongs to the Name of God and demonstrates God's motherliness.[63] To establish the place of Marian devotion in Christian faith and piety, Ratzinger explored the theological depths of Gabriel's angelic salutation of Mary. Drawing on the work of Laurentin and Lyonnet on Luke's infancy narrative, he interpreted Mary as fulfilling the twofold promise prophesied of the Daughter of Zion: that God will come as saviour and dwell in Israel. Mary is Daughter of Zion and Ark of the Covenant in person because 'she lives out entirely that which

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[60] Benedict XVI, *Homily*, 8 December 2005. www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20051208_anniv-vat-council.html

[61] Ratzinger, 'The Sign of the Woman', 39.

[62] Joseph Ratzinger, '"You are full of grace": Elements of Biblical Devotion to Mary', trans. Josephine Koeppel, *Communio* 16.1, 1989, 54–68.

[63] Ibid 54-55.

is signified by "Zion"',[64] meaning that:

> Mary is a person who is totally open, who has made herself wholly receptive, and has placed herself, keenly and without limits, without fear for her own destiny, in the hands of God. It also means that she lives entirely out of and with her relationship to God.[65]

Here, Ratzinger calls out parallels in the faith journeys of Abraham, the father of believers, and Mary, 'Mother of the faithful': the joy at the promise of a son, the hour of darkness on Mount Moriah and Calvary, and finally the miracle of Isaac's rescue and Jesus's Resurrection.

From this Lucan interpretation of Mary, Ratzinger identifies two further critical aspects of her: as prophetess, and in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection. The Fathers, he argues, saw the prophetic in the mystical element of Mary's being. Mary as prophetess is seen in her prayer and mediative character, apparent in three passages of Luke: 'she pondered what this greeting could mean'. Ratzinger links this contemplative remembrance with that of John's Gospel's 'spirit-empowered unfolding of the mission of Jesus in the time of the Church'. This mediative reflection allows her to take these events 'into that inner space of understanding' from which she 'discerns the whole beyond the isolated events'. Mary is prophetess because she listened to the Word with her heart in such a way that 'she is able to give it to the world anew'. As a result, her existence 'was a living in the Holy Spirit's sphere'.[66]

In relation to Mary's role at the Cross, Ratzinger argues that Jesus's action of giving Mary to the disciple (Jn 19:26) indicates her role: she is at God's disposal and must let go, becoming the disciple's mother. He notes that Christian piety sees in the suffering mother an image of God's divine compassion. Ratzinger links this image with the Old Testament's description of God's compassion (*rachamim*), which uses the Hebrew image of the womb, *racham*. This term refers to a person being-with-another, describing how God 'shelters us in himself'. Christianity has expressed this reality, Ratzinger argues, in the Pietà: the mother grieving for her dead son, 'a human being wholly absorbed in God's mystery'. The Cross, he contends, is only concluded in this image. The Mother's pain is an Easter pain revealing 'the transformation of death into the redemptive being-with of love'.[67] Mary's place and role at the Cross, for Ratzinger, do not lead to Mary being Co-Redemptrix.

**Phase 3: Some Further Clarifications on Mary as the Female Dimension of Salvation History**

There are two noteworthy references to include here: Ratzinger's reflection on the use of the term 'Father' for God in the interview published as *God and the World* (2000 (2002)), and

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[64] Ibid 57-58.
[65] Ibid 60.
[66] Ibid 61-65.
[67] Ibid 65-68.

Ratzinger's theological interpretation of history in the third volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, on the Infancy Narratives (2012). A third statement, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith when Ratzinger was Prefect, is included for completeness, demonstrating the role of Mary in anthropology. In *God and the World*, Ratzinger reiterates that humanity is created male and female, underscoring that God is neither male nor female, even if in prayer the Bible addresses God as Father. Noting that the Bible 'equally attributes feminine characteristics' to God—e.g., *rachamin, the motherly body of God*—he insists that Father is a non-interchangeable word, given by Christ to convey something about God. In answering the question of why, Ratzinger admits that 'at the moment we are in a new phase of reflection on this question, but I think that in the end we cannot provide an answer'. He does note two things in this regard: First, monotheism emerged in the midst of 'god-couples', in the context of gods and goddesses. The God of Israel is different. God chose Israel to be the bride—to be in relation with God. This choosing of Israel provides 'the fulfilment of the mystery of how God loves his people as a bride is loved'.[68] Second, the mother-goddess of ancient Greek and Egyptian mythology led to pantheistic models of divinity. In monotheism, God creates, and the image of the Father illustrates the distinction between God's act of creation through the Word, and separately, creation and the creature.[69]

This explanation is given further colour through Ratzinger's reflection on the Infancy Narratives, which he sees as detailing Jesus's 'deeper origins and hence his true being'. Luke and Matthew's genealogies are symbolic structures that place Jesus in history, underscoring that Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit from Mary. Thus, our true genealogy is birth from God in faith.[70] The infancy accounts, with precise dates and geographies, are histories in the sense of real events interpreted theologically.[71] The virginal conception occurs through Mary's obedience, opening a door to God's action: 'Mary appears as God's living tent, in which he chooses to dwell among men in a new way'.[72] Ratzinger, as Benedict XVI, sees a fearless woman full of composure:

> she stands before us as a woman of great interiority, who holds heart and mind in harmony and seeks to understand the context, the overall significance of God's message. In this way, she becomes an image of the Church as she considers the word of God, tries to understand it in its entirety and guards in her memory the things that have been given to her.[73]

Ratzinger made one notable intervention in an official capacity, beyond his personal work as a theologian. In the *Letter on the Collaboration between Man and Woman* (2004), the

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[68] Ratzinger, *God and the World*, 101-103.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore, New York: Image, 2012, xi – xii, 8 – 13.

[71] Ibid 17, 46.

[72] Ibid 29.

[73] Ibid 33 – 34.

Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) offered reflections on human nature based on the biblical vision of the human person.[74] The letter's intent was to support the 'authentic advancement of woman', in light of contrary currents of thought. This letter locates Christian anthropology in the two Genesis creation accounts, which it sees as revealing the 'truth concerning the human person as the image and likeness of God', which 'constitutes the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology'.[75] Man and woman, created in the image and likeness of the personal God, are persons. The letter makes two observations of specific relevance here: First, that in the second creation account the man 'is still referred to with the generic expression Adam'. Second, that the term 'helpmate' denotes a vital helper, not an inferior status, as highlighted by the fact that 'God too is at times called *ezer* with regard to human beings (cf. Ex 18:4; Ps 10:14)'.[76] In Genesis 3:15, the letter notes the promise of a saviour who will overcome the distortion of the original plan for man and woman. The woman and her offspring will break the logic of sin.[77] Salvation history, and with it redemption, occurs in terms of the nuptial mystery between God and Israel.[78]

The letter sees that the biblical vision of the human being illustrates that human beings are made for 'relationship with the other-beyond-the-self'. Woman, in her potential for motherhood, exists 'for the other', reflecting the communion of love fundamental to the likeness with the Triune God.[79] There is no Christian vocation, the letter insists, without 'the concrete gift of oneself to the other'. Sexual differentiation is an essential element of Christian anthropology. Man and woman are marked with the signs of masculinity and femininity, expressed by the body. Importantly, regarding Mary, the letter rejects any notion of femininity associated with an outdated mode of passivity. To imitate Mary is to imitate the way of love. Critical to its reference to the feminine, the letter states that

> the feminine values mentioned here are above all human values: the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible. It is only because women are more immediately attuned to these values that they are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values. But, in the final analysis, every human being, man or woman, is destined to be "for the other". In this perspective, that which is called "femininity" is more than simply an attribute of the female sex. The word designates indeed the fundamental human capacity to live for the other and because of the other.[80]

Mary's disposition of listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise, and waiting reflects

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[74] *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration between Men and Women in the Church and the World*. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html
[75] Ibid no. 5.
[76] Ibid no. 6, fn 5.
[77] Ibid no. 1-7.
[78] Ibid no. 11.
[79] Ibid no. 8.
[80] Ibid no. 14.

the spiritual history of Israel. These traits are 'an essential aspect of Christian life', which women live with particular intensiveness and naturalness.[81]

In highlighting that Christian anthropology is based on the Genesis creation accounts, the letter provides critical direction on how the generic Hebrew word 'Adam', the human, and the Greek philosophical terms feminine/femininity are to be properly understood and applied in Christian anthropology. This has particular relevance to the thought of St. Paul and Aquinas.[82] The letter's importance is in providing a parallel movement for anthropology to that undertaken by Aquinas for Aristotle's highest good. Aquinas Christianised the highest good by moving it from the city to God. Likewise, the letter moves the Aristotelean dichotomy of masculinity and femininity, equated with the male and female, to the generic Hebrew term 'Adam', the human, who is created male and female. Thus, human beings, created male and female, in their biological specificity are understood to be signs of masculine and feminine attributes, which are ultimately attributes of the one indivisible human condition.

Now rightly located in Adam—the human, created male and female—work can commence to appropriately define the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in the Christian context, and to purify their role in Christian anthropology.[83] Illustrating that Christian anthropology is based upon the Genesis accounts read in light of Christ and Mary, the Letter demonstrates the necessity for elements of Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle's philosophical anthropology to be purified of aspects misaligned with Scripture, underscoring that, from a Christian anthropological perspective, speculative anthropology must be aligned to and be congruent with the men and women of salvation history. The litmus test of Christian anthropology is the men and women of the male and female lines of the Old and New Testaments. Ratzinger's development of Vatican II's text on Mary defines her as the exemplar of person in humanity, and as Church in person who is humanity's representative. The person of Mary plays a fundamental role in illuminating the full potential of the human being in relation to God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

## Conclusion: Mary the Person, who is the Fulfilment of the Female Line in the Bible

In returning to the conciliar text on Mary, Ratzinger demonstrated the hermeneutic of reform in practice, whose hallmark is the interplay of the permanent principle of faith in conjunction with the contingent sociohistorical factors that produce innovation in continuity with

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[81] Ibid No. 16.

[82] See Kristin M. Popik, *The Philosophy of Woman of St. Thomas Aquinas*: www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=2793 This is a summary of Popik's doctoral thesis (1979).

[83] Peter Kreeft's 2021 philosophical account of Mary demonstrates this continuing confusion of terms emanating from the Aristotelean dichotomy of masculine and feminine taken up by Aquinas, which distorts Christian anthropology, being misaligned with the women of Scripture. Peter Kreeft, *The Greatest Philosopher Who Ever Lived*, Ignatius: San Francisco, 2021, 117-137, 169-199.

Tradition.[84] In his clarification and development of the conciliar text on Mary, Ratzinger elucidated the elements that create the distinct role and place of Mary—and, through her, of the Old Testament's women—in Christian faith and theology, along with the basis for her appropriate veneration. As Ratzinger demonstrates, those elements may appear discrete and silent—even unimportant—but without them the finely balanced totality of Catholic faith, which points to the totality of Christianity, struggles to achieve equilibrium. The foundation laid by Ratzinger for a fuller treatise on Mary sought a threefold outcome: First, to broaden the narrow interpretation of Mary as Mother of God, expanding it to place Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Second, to address the legitimate critiques of the post-conciliar period, such as feminist theology. Third, to demonstrate the necessary approach to biblical interpretation, where history—things that happened—is interpreted theologically and eschatologically, with openness in faith to God's actions in the world and power over matter. Aspects of the Gospel accounts that can initially appear difficult to reconcile are thus placed in their proper context: time and space, which rightly eschews a singular narrative and linear perspective, understanding history as defined by the particular and the personal.

The inseparability of Mary and the Church, for Ratzinger, is the hermeneutical key to the Church's understanding of Mary. At the centre of this synthesis is the Old Testament's female line, which establishes Mary's Scriptural basis in Christianity. Mary is not a standalone figure who emerges in Luke's Gospel, nor something alien to the faith of Israel, but the apex of the female dimension that commenced with humanity's creation as male and female, moving then to the Fall and promise of a saviour, through the men and women of the Old Testament, to the fulfilment of those lines in the true Adam and the true Eve. The covenant presented in nuptial imagery, with Israel represented as the woman, is essential to this understanding, demonstrating God's love for the creature. Christian anthropology, like salvation history, requires the female dimension in parallel and indispensable to the male dimension, leading Ratzinger to present the human being as person, in its biological specificity, as a relational reflection of God's image. Ratzinger's analysis points to the need to elevate the integral role played in Christianity by the Old Testament's figures, both men and women, in the consciousness of Christian scholars and the faithful alike, while illustrating Mary's essential place within it. One way of achieving that elevation would be to provide a fifth and a sixth mystery of the rosary. In addition to the joyful, sorrowful, glorious, and luminous mysteries, the mysteries of the women and the men of the Old Testament would illustrate the journey of salvation history that is fulfilled in the true and Final Adam, Jesus Christ, and the true and New Eve, Mary. A seventh mystery may even be apt, dedicated to the journey of the apostolic Church.

Emphasising Mary as the Church in person, Ratzinger shows her to be the very definition of person in humanity, which in its perfection fulfils the potential of the human

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[84] Mary Frances McKenna, 'The Hermeneutic of Reform', in Francesca Aran Murphy and Tracey Rowland (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Joseph Ratzinger*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Forthcoming.

being.[85] Mary demonstrates that the Christian faith is not some passive surrender to whatever is, but a relationship with God, an engagement in dialogue with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, where questions are asked and clarifications sought, and where events occur and words are spoken that are not immediately comprehensible but must be pondered, held together, and stored up. Christ must be born over and over by those who hear and keep the Word of God, even as they wonder 'how can this be?' and 'what can this mean?' (Lk. 1:30, 35) and ask of Jesus 'why have you done this to us?' (Lk. 2:51). This is Mary's motherhood of God and the Church. In drawing out the female line of the Old Testament and the women who represent Israel, Ratzinger brings biblical anthropology to the foreground in Christian theology and philosophy. In emphasising the female dimension of Scripture and its indispensable role throughout salvation history, Ratzinger enriches that history, demonstrating it to be a history of God's actions and deeds in the world that seeks a response from humanity. Mary, in fulfilling the prophecy of the Daughter of Zion being the true Ark of the Covenant in person, represents humanity in the specificity of her womanhood and Motherhood. She is the Virgin Mother through whom God starts anew, through whose 'Yes' God's power over matter—the cloud hovering over the tent of the Ark of the Covenant—brings about new creation in Jesus Christ. The image of God is a person who is for (Father), from (Son), and with (Holy Spirit). If, as the CDF's letter says, 'woman' represents the capacity to live for the other, then mother, like Father, is the *for* of love, wherefrom Christ the Son is born through the power of the Holy Spirit and the most high power.

Three developments of Ratzinger's contribution suggest themselves: First, Mary as the New Eve is her Son's (the Final Adam's) vital helper. In her role as humanity's representative, Mary shows what it means to be a vital helper (*ezer*) for her Son, i.e., for the human being to provide a place for God to dwell without reserve. Interpreting Mary—and, hence, the human being—as *ezer* underscores the relational nature of Christian anthropology in the biological specificity within which each person exists. Likewise, Mary demonstrates that the Church itself is God's *ezer*, vital helper. Second, in Mary's 'Yes', she is the apex and fulfilment of the female line in the Bible—the new Eve, the new Woman. Mary and the Final Adam show the way to every human's true potential. Thus, Mary provides the grammar of the human being in relation with Jesus her Son, and through her Son with the Father in the Holy Spirit. In his description of Mary as person, particularly in relation to Luke's account, the grammar for the meaning of mother in relation to the Triune God becomes apparent (Lk. 1:34-38, 1:46 – 55, 2:19, 2:51, 8:19-21, 11:27-28, Acts 1:14). Mother, for the human person, then means to give birth to the Son in the ongoing hearing and doing God's Word. In following the way of Mary, as Mother in relation to the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, the human being is mother in actualising their personhood by being a space for God to dwell without reserve.[86]

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[85] Mary Frances McKenna, 'Mary, the Mother of God, Providing the Grammar of mother for Person for the Human being: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives from Joseph Ratzinger and Peter Kreeft', *Centre for Marian Studies Research Seminar*, 13 November 2024.
[86] Ibid.

Third, Ratzinger's theological reflection on Mary invites engagement from other schools of thought. One such fruitful engagement, particularly in relation to the two developments outlined immediately above, would be with Peter Kreeft's philosophical reflection on Mary.[87] Kreeft's declaration of Mary as the greatest philosopher who ever lived demonstrates how Ratzinger's discourse on Mary can be valuably further developed, in this case from a philosophical perspective, while also continuing to clarify Mary's role and place in Christian faith and theology. These three developments will support and inform the work to develop the fuller treatises on Mary for which Ratzinger advocated and laid the foundation stones. By developing that fuller treatise on Mary, not only will the too-narrow Mariology that he sought to overcome be broadened appropriately, but it can then be integrated into the full breadth of Christian faith and theology. For, as Ratzinger argued, without Mary and the Church the fullness of the Bible cannot be perceived, nor can the fullness of the human being.

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[87] Peter Kreeft, *The Greatest Philosopher Who Ever Lived*.