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Abstract

Apart from sporadic references, mainly in obscure sources, it is only in the modern era that Mary has been acclaimed 'Mother of the Church', with Paul VI's declaration at the end of the third session of Vatican II marking a significant turning point in the use of this title to honour Mary, and leading to Pope Francis' establishment of a universal feast on the Monday after Pentecost Sunday in 2018.

The 'Pneumatological recentring' advocated by Laurentin and Mühlen provides a helpful context within which to reflect upon the primacy of the Spirit's role as Mother of the Church, as indicated by the earliest known usage of the title by Bede, and as forcibly argued for by Nissiotis in response to Paul VI's proclamation.

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Among the criticisms of Paul VI's proclamation at the end of the third session of the Second Vatican Council that Mary is 'Mother of the Church' was the rebuke of Nikos Nissiotis, an Orthodox Observer at the council. In asking whether this title should be interpreted as 'the emergence of a dogma for want of putting the creative act of the Paraclete at the origin of the historic Church',¹ Nissiotis highlighted the contrast between the place given to pneumatology by Eastern Christians and by Roman Catholics. His viewing the prime 'Mother of the Church' as the Holy Spirit is supported by the relatively early use of this title for the Spirit and its late emergence as a Marian appellation. This article will explore the history and theology behind this title, before considering it in the light of other Pneumatological titles being used in a secondary, derived sense for Mary.

The history of the title 'Mother of the Church'

The decree 'On the celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mother of the Church in the General Roman Calendar' issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on 11th February 2018 describes how the Marian title 'Mother of the Church' was 'in some ways... already present in the mind of the Church from the premonitory words of Saint Augustine and Saint Leo the Great.'² While finding the title consonant with these patristic texts, it is striking that it is not possible for usages of the actual title in writings of the early church to be referred to. Although some theologians describe Saint Ambrose as being the first recorded usage of this title, often mentioning Hugo Rahner's rediscovery of Ambrose's writings,³ this can be explained by Berengaud's commentary on the Book of Revelation, *Expositio super septem visiones libri Apocalypsis*, from no earlier than the ninth

¹ Heribert Mühlen, *L'Esprit dans l'Église. Tome II*. Paris: Cerf, 1969, 147, quoting Kyrios 5, 1965, 92

² www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20180211_decreto-mater-ecclesiae_en.html

³ Cf. T. M. C. Nguyen, 'Renewed Perspectives on Lumen Gentium's Marian-Ecclesiological Synthesis', *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies* 1.1, 2021, 1-11, 5, referring to H. Rahner's *Mater Ecclesia - Lobpreis der Kirche aus dem ersten Jahrtausend*, Köln: Einsiedeln, 1944. Available online at: <https://doi.org/10.53162/CMS/MARIA01104>

century, having been attributed to Ambrose and included in *Patrologia Latina* Vol. XVII under Ambrose, hence the alternative attribution of 'Pseudo-Ambrose'.⁴

The use of 'Mother of the Church' is extremely rare before the Middle Ages. Although Gabriel Roschini maintained that the fifth-century epitaph of the child Magnus conserved in the Lateran Museum was a reliable first known usage of *mater ecclesiae* referring to Mary,⁵ René Laurentin and Theodore Kœhler both present convincing arguments against such an interpretation. Kœhler concludes that since there is no other witness from this era to referring to Mary in this way, and that it is entirely inconsistent with the doctrinal preoccupations of the fifth century, it seems likely that the engraver made a mistake, intending to write *mater ecclesia* (Mother Church) instead of *mater ecclesiae* (Mother of the Church).⁶ He refers to the number of other faults in this epitaph and the very slight difference in spelling between the two terms, as well as the similarities between this text and a text of Cyprian (writing about *mater ecclesia*) to strengthen his argument.⁷

Laurentin's critique of Roschini's theory include his refuting Roschini's suggestion that the author of the inscription had deliberately chosen to transform the '*mater ecclesia*' of Cyprian's earlier text to attribute to Mary the welcome into heaven Cyprian had ascribed to the Church.⁸ Like Kœhler, Laurentin describes Roschini's account of Marian fervour at Ephesus as anachronistic, referring to Yves Congar's conclusion that 'the Fathers did not think to attribute to Mary a role in Redemption [...] nor a role of spiritual maternity and causality in the order of grace with regards to the church',⁹ and he notes that the patristic monographs

⁴ Cf. A. Padovano, 'Mary, Mother of the Church', *Marian Studies* 17, 1966, 27-45, 38. Available online at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol17/iss1/6/

⁵ Cf. R. Laurentin, 'La Proclamation de Marie "Mater Ecclesia" par Paul VI', in *Paolo VI e i problemi ecclesiologicali al concilio, Colloquio internazionale di Studio, Brescia 19-20-21 settembre 1986*, 1989, Rome: Studium, 310-390, 316, referring to G. M. Roschini, 'Maria ... Madre della Chiesa', *Marianum* 26, 1965, 309-330.

⁶ T. Kœhler, 'Marie, Mater Ecclesiae', *Études Mariales* 11, 1953, 133-157, 134. Kœhler writes that he is rejecting the interpretation of the (1920) *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* by Fernand, C. and Leclercq, H. (Paris: Letouzey, art. *Eglise*, IV, 2, 2236-2238)

⁷ *Ibid.* referring to Cyprian's *De Lapis*, 2: CSEL, III, I., 238. Kœhler also suggests (p. 134) that if the engraving was written as intended, it could be read in the light of Galatians 4.26 ('the Jerusalem which is above is free, and she is our mother'), so that 'Mother of the Church' refers to the heavenly Jerusalem, not Mary.

⁸ Cyprian's text in *De Lapis* reads: 'The mother Church welcomes you joyfully – you martyrs – who come from combat', while the phrase in the epitaph in question reads: 'The mother of the Church welcomes you joyfully, you who come from this world.' Cf. Laurentin, 'La Proclamation de Marie "Mater Ecclesia" par Paul VI', 316.

⁹ *Ibid.* footnote no. 2, quoting Y. Congar, 'Marie et l'Église dans la pensée Patristique', *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 38, 1954, 3-38, 8-9. It is worth noting that Laurentin abridges Congar's original text; the full text gives a clearer picture of what Congar meant by the Fathers not attributing a role to Mary in

of W. Durig and D. Fernandez both reject the epitaph as celebrating Mary as Mother of the Church.¹⁰

Leaving aside this fifth century engraving, it is not until Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs in the early eighth century that the first known reference to 'the Mother of the Church' is found, referring not to Mary, but to 'the grace of the Holy Spirit'. Bede describes how 'the grace of the Holy Spirit, through which the Church is restored to God and consecrated, can be most appropriately called the mother of the Church',¹¹ a proposition which, as he explains, can be logically deduced from Christ's words to Nicodemus in John 3.5, 'No one, if they are not born of water and the Spirit, can enter the Kingdom of God.'¹²

When then, did 'Mother of the Church' come to refer to Mary? While the motherhood of Mary and that of the Church were frequently connected, and the work of the Holy Spirit in both Mary and the Church emphasised, for the Fathers of the Church through to the Middle Ages, Mary was regarded as an example, type or archetype of the Church rather than as Mother of the Church.

From the earliest Christian writings Mary and the Church were so closely associated that it was sometimes difficult to know which one was being referred to, or whether both were intended, as for example, with 'the woman' of Revelation 12. Irenaeus described Mary as 'the mother of the members of Christ' who had 'cooperated by charity that faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head';¹³ and Clement of Alexandria declared 'there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her "Church"'.¹⁴ With Ambrose in the fourth century, Mary as type (or archetype) of the Church became a widespread motif.¹⁵ The significance that was given to this belief in the Middle Ages is well

the redemption, as he describes that this is 'neither with the title of "co-redemptrix", nor even as the one who represented humanity at Calvary and accepted salvation on their behalf'. Thus, Congar is not referring to Mary's participation in the redemption through her role as 'New Eve' which was so prominent in patristic writings.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bede, *In Cant. C.V*, 25, ML 91, 1183 B, quoted in Kœhler, 'Marie, Mater Ecclesiae', 134

¹² Significantly, in the following centuries the title was used in a very different, but eminently logical manner, to refer to the synagogue, as found in the twelfth century Isaac of Stella, with his contemporary Alain de Lille specifying that this was particularly appropriate, because the synagogue had given the apostles, who became founders of the Church of the gentiles. Cf. Kœhler, 'Marie, Mater Ecclesiae', 134

¹³ Irenaeus, *adv. Haer*, 111 24, 1: PG 7, 966 B, quoted in *Lumen Gentium* 53

¹⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 1, 6, 42: PG 8,300, quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 813.

¹⁵ Cf. Congar, *Marie et l'Église dans la pensée Patristique*, 14

illustrated by Otto Semmelroth's seminal work *Mary, Archetype of the Church*, including his fascinating example of the "living architectonics" of the Order of Saint Brigid:

...there existed in the Middle Ages a living architectonics which should be mentioned as witness to the convictions of the Church in that era. The Order of St Brigid was established in the middle of the fourteenth century. Its structure was as follows: monks and nuns were to live in separate parts of the monastery under the leadership of an abbess. The monks numbered thirteen and symbolized the College of Apostles (including St. Paul). The nuns were sixty in number; four deacons represented the four great Latin Fathers, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and Gregory; and eight lay brothers raised the number to seventy-two disciples. Thus, the entire community symbolized the universal Church. The abbess' task was to unify and direct the whole household and to serve as a symbol of Mary, the peak and point of unison, the Type of the Church.¹⁶

Apart from sporadic references, mainly from rather obscure sources, it is only in the modern era that Mary is explicitly referred to as Mother of the Church. The first reference to the term is from a commentary on the Book of Revelation by Berengaud, which is often thought to be from the ninth century,¹⁷ although the oldest manuscript is from the eleventh or twelfth century and some commentators regard it as dating from this era.¹⁸ While Berengaud's use of the term 'Mother of the Church' may be unpredictable, his explanation of its meaning, that Mary's ecclesial motherhood proceeds from the doctrine of Christ's mystical body, was a well-established Patristic theme.¹⁹ Berengaud explains that Mary is Mother of the Church because she has given birth to the Head of the Church and situates this alongside her also being 'daughter of the Church': 'We can indeed say that the Woman of the Apocalypse is Mary, because she is the Mother of the Church, having given birth to the Head of the Church. Yet she is also the daughter of the Church, and the holiest of her members.'²⁰

The next known instance of Mary being named Mother of the Church is found in the *Distinctiones monasticae* of an unknown English Cistercian at the start of the thirteenth century. This reference is particularly significant because it is preceded by the statement

¹⁶ Otto Semmelroth, *Mary, Archetype of the Church*, Dublin: Gill and Son, 1964, 47-48

¹⁷ Cf. J. Galot, 'Theologie du titre "Mère de l'Eglise"', *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 32, 1982, 159-173, 159

¹⁸ Cf. J. Roten, "'Mater Ecclesiae": History, Theology, and Consequences', *Marian Studies* 66, article 2, 2015, 1-54, 4. Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol66/iss1/2

¹⁹ Cf. The quote from Irenaeus given above (p. 3)

²⁰ *Comment. In Apoc 4, 3, 4. PL 17, 876*, quoted in Padovano, *Mary, Mother of the Church*, 38

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that 'the mother of the universal Church is the grace of the Holy Spirit.'²¹ From this Pneumatological starting point (possibly influenced by Bede's earlier similar phrase), the unidentified author proceeds to analyse the meaning of the word 'mother'. Starting from the same logical assertion as Berengaud, that Mary is Mother of the Church because she gave birth to its Head, the author discusses how Mary is both Mother of Christ and Mother of Christians. Referring to *Monstra te esse matrem* ('show yourself a mother'), from the *Ave Maria Stella*, 'the author extends the primitive sense of the hymn which was a simple invocation to the power of the mother of Christ with her son',²² by asking Mary to show herself as mother not only of Christ but also of Christians.

Later references to Mary as Mother of the Church, develop different possible aspects of this mystery, including distinguishing three moments in which Mary exercises her ecclesial maternity: the Annunciation, Calvary and in her heavenly blessedness.²³ However, they occurred only very occasionally. Above all, Mary was understood to be a type of the Church and the individual mother of each Christian. Laurentin succinctly summarizes the history of this Marian title: '*Mater Ecclesiae* is one of the titles which is least attested to in the immense domain of Marian onomastics. Unknown in the East, it is relatively late in the West: Berengaud... is the first to use it, with subtle nuance. He was hardly ever followed.'²⁴

How then did we arrive at Mary being declared Mother of the Church by Paul VI on 21st November 1964,²⁵ a votive mass being established in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of the Church in 1975,²⁶ and a universal feast in her honour being declared by Pope Francis in 2018?

²¹ Cf. H. Barré, 'Marie et l'Esprit dans la tradition occidentale jusqu'à Saint Thomas d'Aquin', *Études Mariales* 25, 1968, 59-143, 78-79, referring to *Distinct. monast.*, III, 174 (*De Matre*), éd. Pitra, *Spic. Solesm.*, III, 130-1.

²² Kœhler, 'Marie, Mater Ecclesiae', 136

²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 137

²⁴ R. Laurentin, 'La Vierge au Concile', *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 48, 1964, 32-46, 43

²⁵ Cf. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641121_conclusions-iii-sessions.html

²⁶ Cf. Roten, "'Mater Ecclesiae": History, Theology, and Consequences', 21-22: 'The 1987 *Collectio Missarum BVM* features three special masses called "Image and Mother of the Church." The first of these masses was composed already in 1974, and shortly afterwards was inserted in the second *editio typica* edition of the Roman Missal.'

The influence of Paul VI

The growing focus on Mary's role as mediator during the twentieth century led to John XXIII being the first Pope to use the title 'Mary, Mother of the Church' on several occasions,²⁷ and it became a favoured title of Paul VI, who made it known that he would be in favour of its presence within *Lumen Gentium*. Laurentin recounts how Paul VI (as Cardinal Montini) used the title on 8th September 1959, before it was ever used by John XXIII, as he encouraged the diocese of Milan to prepare for the Council by drawing close to Mary, the Mother of the Church: 'An ecumenical council has been announced. [...] Let us seek to be close to the *Mother of the Church* (vicini alla *Madre della Chiesa*) who is the most holy Mary.'²⁸ Paul VI also made at least three interventions on behalf of the title 'Mother of the Church':

As Cardinal Montini, on December 5, 1962, he expressed his satisfaction that the Council was going to honor [sic] Mary under this title. On October 11, 1963, as pope, Paul VI expressed the wish before the Council that, in the great vision of the Church, Mary might be recognized as Mother of the Church, the Mother of God and our mother. Again, on December 4, 1963, adding determination and urgency to his words, the pope requested unanimity and expressed dedication to recognize Mary as the Mother of the Church.²⁹

However, despite Paul VI's advocacy of this title, towards the end of the third session of the council, on 29th October 1964, a large majority voted not to make any amendments to the proposed *Lumen Gentium* Chapter VIII, including not to include 'Mother of the Church' and to maintain the presence of 'Mediatrice'. Edward Schillebeeckx relates how there were only 24 votes explicitly in favour of incorporating 'Mother of the Church', with a majority of 1559 rejecting any amendments, and 521 votes proposing an array of changes.³⁰ This moment marked the end of significant conciliar disagreement about the use of 'Mother of the Church', which had included unaccounted for changes of the title of the Marian schema to both include

²⁷ Leo XIV's having called Mary '*Ecclesiae mater et Regina Apostolorum*,' and '*verissime quidem Mater Ecclesiae*' in 1895, in *De Rosario Mariali—Adjutricem populi*, (5th September 1895) is worth noting. Cf. *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 28 [1895-96]: 130, quoted in Roten, "'Mater Ecclesiae": History, Theology, and Consequences', 4.

²⁸ Laurentin, 'La Proclamation de Marie "Mater Ecclesia" par Paul VI', 320

²⁹ Roten, "'Mater Ecclesiae": History, Theology, and Consequences', 18-19

³⁰ Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, London: SCM Press, 1993, 15. Laurentin recounts how Cardinal Wyszyński even asked that the title be defined, as requested by the Polish bishops. Cf. René Laurentin, *L'enjeu du Concile. Bilan de la 3^e session*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965, 40.

and exclude 'Mother of the Church'.³¹ Yet, although the title was not included in the final text, some of the reasoning behind the title is found in *Lumen Gentium* no. 53's quoting Saint Irenaeus' description of Mary as 'the mother of the members of Christ... having cooperated by charity that [the] faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head.'³²

Paul VI's motivations for declaring Mary, Mother of the Church at the end of the third session of Vatican II were no doubt a mixture of personal devotion and conviction, and an attempt to reach out to those who had very much wanted Vatican II to honour Mary with a new title and were disappointed by the ecumenically sensitive final version; Joseph Ratzinger described it as 'a deliberate response to the clearly brewing crisis'.³³ Some reports relate that Paul VI had thought it would be an ecumenically helpful way of viewing Mary, presumably because it indicates an ecclesio-centric Mariology, in continuity with the significant emphasis of the early church on Mary as type of the Church, and John Macquarrie in his influential (1966) *Principles of Christian Theology* wrote that 'the best clue to the interpretation of [Mary's] place in the New Testament teaching is afforded by the title *Mother of the Church*', with its 'firm Scriptural foundation'.³⁴ However, other Protestant theologians found this title, like many other Catholic descriptions, as an obstacle to unity, such as Pastor Richard-Molard, who writing in *Figaro* on 30th November 1964, asked 'why Paul VI devoted half of his speech to the proclamation of Mary "Mother of the Church"..., knowing that Catholic mariology is one of the greatest stumbling blocks between Rome and the Reform.'³⁵ An example of the reaction of Orthodox theologians has already been indicated by the striking quote from Nissiotis with which this article began.

³¹ Schillebeeckx recounts how 'the title was suddenly changed [to include "Mother of the Church"] – no one knows by whom or why', while Alberigo and Komonchak describe how the title of the draft text on Mary prepared by Charles Balić 'appears to have been changed because of opposition, particularly from Laurentin, against the title "Mater Ecclesiae."' Cf. Schillebeeckx and Halkes, *Mary: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 14, and Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak, (eds) *History of Vatican II: Volume I*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995, 258.

³² adv. Haer, 111 24, 1: PG 7, 966 B; Harvey 2, 13i, ed. Sagnard, Sources Chr., 398.

³³ J. Ratzinger, 'On the position of Mariology and Marian spirituality within the totality of faith and theology' in H. Moll, (ed), *The Church and Women: A compendium*, Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1988, 67-79, 71. Ratzinger emphasises how 'the new, Church-centred mariology was (and largely remained) alien to those Council Fathers who had advocated Marian spirituality.' (Ibid.)

³⁴ Cf. T. Kœhler, 'Mary's spiritual maternity after the Second Vatican Council', *Marian Studies* 23, 1972, 39-68, 57

³⁵ Quoted in Laurentin, 'L'enjeu du Concile. Bilan de la 3^e session', 256.

Despite 'Mother of the Church' having been used as a title for both the Holy Spirit and Mary there was nothing in the address of Paul VI proclaiming Mary as 'Mother of the Church' to indicate a connection between Mary's title and the Holy Spirit. Similarly, when Pope Francis established the universal feast of '*The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church*' on the Monday after Pentecost Sunday, despite the dating of the feast, the decree establishing the feast does not explicitly connect Mary, Mother of the Church, and the Holy Spirit. In the final part of this article the relationship between other Marian titles or descriptions and their primary Pneumatological meaning will be explored, providing a context within which Mary's ecclesial motherhood can be understood through reference that of the Holy Spirit.

Marian displacement of the Spirit

In the years immediately following Vatican II several theologians explored how Catholics tend to attribute to Mary titles which are primarily titles or attributes of the Holy Spirit, a tendency which had already been highlighted in the 1940s and 1950s. Writing in 1949, the Anglican theologian Philip Pare maintained that 'the Roman Church has used the cultus of our Lady in place of the Holy Spirit', with her being given 'many of His powers of Guidance' and 'her place as mother' having 'also been used to invigorate the family feeling of the Church, where again the Holy Spirit should have the primacy.'³⁶ Writing a few years later, Lucien Marchand, a Lutheran pastor, concluded that the 'connections between Marian piety and 'spiritual' Protestant piety are undeniable'.³⁷ Referring to both of these articles, Congar responded from a Catholic perspective: 'We should not despise the accusation which is made to us of a type of translation in Marian terms of the work and the interior experiences of the Spirit, going as far as replacing the Paraclete by Mary. I personally have known cases where this reproach was merited.'³⁸

³⁶ P. Pare, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Western Church', *Theology* 51, 1948, 293-300, 297

³⁷ L. Marchand, 'Le contenu évangélique de la dévotion Mariale', *Foi et Vie* 49, 1951, 509-521, 520. Marchand argues that the Holy Spirit being understood by Catholics to be reserved to the Catholic hierarchy 'explains and motivates the intervention of Marian devotion taking the place of devotion to the Holy Spirit or merging with her under another name.' (p. 517)

³⁸ Y. Congar, 'Marie et l'Eglise chez les Protestants', *Études Mariales* 10, 1952, 87-106, 94

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This theme of Catholic Marian displacement of the Spirit came into prominence in the immediate post-conciliar years. An often-quoted article from 1965 by Elsie Gibson, a Protestant theologian researching attitudes to Mary of Protestants from a wide variety of traditions, relates the impact discovering this phenomenon had on her:

When I first began reading Catholic periodicals and books, I was puzzled and offended by caricatures of our views regarding the Holy Spirit more than by anything else. ... When I began the study of Catholic theology, every place I expected to find an exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, I found Mary. What Protestants universally attribute to the action of the Holy Spirit was attributed to Mary.³⁹

Two Catholic theologians writing immediately after Vatican II gave particularly passionate responses to this phenomenon: René Laurentin and Heribert Mühlen, both of whom were influenced by the writings of the other. Key elements of their argument will be given to help situate Nissiotis' critique regarding Mary being proclaimed 'Mother of the Church' within the wider context of Pneumatological Marian displacement, and what Laurentin calls 'Pneumatological recentring'.⁴⁰

The second edition of Mühlen's (1964) *Una mystica persona* published in 1967 included an extended section on 'Mary and the mediation of the Holy Spirit'.⁴¹ Mühlen states his intended aim: to focus on 'the theological thesis of Mary "co-redemptrix" and "mediatrix", discussed everywhere before Vatican II, but which the council has practically removed.'⁴² Highlighting how the council's reinsertion of Mary into the Church had 'enabled the rediscovery of the function of mediatrix of the Spirit of Christ himself, which had been obscured before the council by discussions about the mediation of Mary',⁴³ Mühlen critically assesses *Lumen Gentium's* presentation of Mary as Mediatrix, relating it to the mediation of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ E. Gibson, 'Mary and the Protestant Mind', *Review for Religious* 24, 1965, 383-398, 396-397. Cf. K. McNamara, 'The Holy Spirit and Mary', *The Way Supplement* 51, 1984, 8-22, 16, and E. Johnson, 'Mary and the female face of God', *Theological Studies* 50, 1989, 500-526, 512.

⁴⁰ R. Laurentin, 'Esprit Saint et théologie mariale', *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 89, 1967, 26-42, 31

⁴¹ This second edition was translated into French as *L'Esprit dans l'Église* (2 volumes, Paris: Cerf, 1969) in which the section *Marie et la médiation de l'Esprit du Christ* is in Volume 2, 134-175.

⁴² Mühlen, *L'Esprit dans l'Église*, 134

⁴³ Mühlen, *L'Esprit dans l'Église*, 135

After immense debate, the council fathers had eventually agreed to include 'Mediatrice' as the last in a list of titles under which the church invokes Mary: 'Therefore, the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrice' (*Lumen Gentium* no. 62). Mühlen argues that in assimilating 'Mediatrice' to other titles under which Mary is invoked, 'functions which in Holy Scripture go back clearly and primarily to the Holy Spirit are attributed to Mary', with '*o paraklêtos*, which John 14.16, 26; 15.26, 16.7 relates to the Pneuma of Jesus' having 'the three meanings of advocate, helper and intercessor.'⁴⁴ Therefore Mühlen sees 'the progressive reduction of the doctrine of Mary Mediatrice' as leading 'directly to pneumatological problems', and argues that the council should have explicitly addressed 'the possible error of attributing to Mary the place and the function of the Holy Spirit.' Noting that *Lumen Gentium* no. 62 emphasises that Mary 'neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator', Mühlen stresses that Mary's intercession 'cannot be understood apart from its dependence on that of the Holy Spirit' and asks: 'Why did the Council not explicitly and energetically emphasise the insurmountable difference which exists between the *Advocatus* and the *Advocata*?'⁴⁵ Mühlen also highlights the Spirit's co-operation in the redemptive work of Christ, seeing Mary's cooperation as 'firstly and essentially a *cooperation in the cooperation of the Holy Spirit in the redemptive work of the Son*',⁴⁶ and stresses the risk of 'placing Mary – thoughtlessly and as a result of not having sufficiently reflected on *all the context* of the work of salvation – in the place and the role of the Holy Spirit.'⁴⁷

Laurentin follows Mühlen's proposal that the Holy Spirit be understood as a 'co-redemptrice', a 'co-worker with Christ in the redemption',⁴⁸ describing how no one seems to have thought of this before Mühlen and lamenting that this has been 'a disregarded chapter in Pneumatology.'⁴⁹ He also lists several devotional formulae in which 'the role which is

⁴⁴ Mühlen, *L'Esprit dans l'Église*, 145

⁴⁵ Mühlen, *L'Esprit dans l'Église*, 146-147

⁴⁶ Mühlen, *L'Esprit dans l'Église*, 158

⁴⁷ Mühlen, *L'Esprit dans l'Église*, 160

⁴⁸ R. Laurentin 'The Marian Question in an Ecumenical Age. Course 32: The Virgin and the Holy Spirit 32-6', *Father René Laurentin Collection, 1948-2003. Marian Library, University of Dayton Libraries, Dayton, Ohio*, 1966, Box 1.

⁴⁹ René Laurentin, *L'Esprit Saint cet inconnu : Découvrir son expérience et sa personne*, Paris: Fayard, 1998, 590. Cf. Laurentin, 'Esprit Saint et théologie mariale', 28, where Laurentin asks: 'How is it that in so many books consecrated to the role of Mary as co-redeemer, the more fundamental co-redemptive role of the Holy Spirit is not evoked?'. He also notes the context of the 'extraordinary development' in Western Mariology when pneumatology was going through a time of significant decline. (Ibid. 27)

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attributed to the Virgin Mary in relation to Christians' is expressed in ways which are '*first of all* appropriate to the Holy Spirit':

- 'To Jesus through Mary', but do we not go to Jesus firstly, and essentially, by the work of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14.26; 15.13-14, etc)?⁵⁰
- 'The Virgin Mary forms Christ in us', but this is firstly and fundamentally the role of the Spirit.
- 'The Virgin who inspires' and 'mother of Good Council'. Are these not primarily functions of the Spirit?
- The Virgin as 'link between us and Christ'. Is this not also an essential role of the Spirit?⁵¹

Laurentin stresses that although all these accolades reveal truths about the role of Mary in the communion of saints, there is a problem when 'the analogous, and more essential, role of the Spirit is neglected'.⁵² It is not a question of condemning the attribution to Mary of formulas which belong at a deeper level to the Holy Spirit but of situating Mary in relation to the Holy Spirit: 'when it is said that Mary has given us Christ at the Incarnation, do we not too often forget that the gift of Christ is essentially Trinitarian, that it is the work of the Spirit in Mary? And if Mary were able to give her consent in the name of humanity, is it not by the power of the Spirit?'⁵³

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What then can this Pneumatological recentring advocated by Mühlen and Laurentin, along with several other prominent theologians, such as Schillebeeckx and Congar,⁵⁴ bring to how Mary's ecclesial motherhood is understood? Recognising the tendency within Catholicism to refer to Mary in terms which Scripture teaches are primarily roles or attributes of the Spirit, leads naturally to considering 'Mother of the Church' within this context.

⁵⁰ "To Jesus through Mary": an expression frequently found in Catholic devotion since the reformation, reaching popularity through St Louis de Montfort's *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*.

⁵¹ Laurentin, 'Esprit Saint et théologie mariale', 27

⁵² Ibid. 28

⁵³ Laurentin, *The Marian Question in an Ecumenical Age. Course 32: The Virgin and the Holy Spirit* 32-6

⁵⁴ Cf. Schillebeeckx and Halkes, *Mary: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, 28, where Schillebeeckx stresses that 'it is not Mary but the Holy Spirit which is the source of all life, including that of the church', and Yves Congar's *I believe in the Holy Spirit. Volume 1*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983, 163-164, which discusses how Mary has been presented as a substitution for the Holy Spirit, with Congar stating: 'The part played by Mary is situated within that played by the Holy Spirit, who made her the mother of the incarnate Word and who is the principle of all holiness and of the communion of the saints.' (p. 164)



It is important to recognise the disagreement among Christians as to which moment it is most appropriate to understand the Church beginning. For example, Laurentin speaks frequently and simply of the birth of the Church at Pentecost,⁵⁵ while the Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 766-767 give a more nuanced account, describing the church as being born ‘primarily of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross’, and ‘revealed by the Holy Spirit’ at Pentecost. Yet, however the commencement of the church is described, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost is clearly a pivotal moment in the birth of the Church, the start of its apostolic mission, such that referring to the Spirit as in some sense ‘mothering’ is clearly fitting. Importantly, as with the other titles referred to above, such as advocate and helper, this is in no way to deny Mary’s motherhood of the Church, but to add an extra dimension to it, one which points to the integral connection of Mary with the Spirit.

The fact that the feast of Mary, Mother of the Church takes place on the day after the celebration of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost provides a helpful liturgical context within which to explore the role of the two ‘Mothers of the Church’, Mary and the Holy Spirit, and the relationship between them and the Church. This provides fertile ground for our awareness of the work of the Spirit to be heightened, and our understanding of Mary’s intrinsic connection to the Spirit to be deepened.

⁵⁵ For example, in his account of ‘the Virgin of beginnings’ Laurentin describes Mary’s presence and prayer at the birth of the Church at Pentecost. Cf. René Laurentin, *La Vierge au Concile*, Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1965, 121