

2002

# Mary Since Vatican II: Decline and Recovery

Avery Dulles

Follow this and additional works at: [http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dulles, Avery (2002) "Mary Since Vatican II: Decline and Recovery," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 53, Article 5.  
Available at: [http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol53/iss1/5](http://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol53/iss1/5)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact [frice1@udayton.edu](mailto:frice1@udayton.edu), [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu).

## MARY SINCE VATICAN II: DECLINE AND RECOVERY

*Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J.\**

The Blessed Virgin Mary has inspired art, poetry, devotion, and theology in manifold ways over the centuries, fulfilling her own prediction, "All generations will call me blessed." My own task this evening is to say a little about Mary in recent Catholic theology. From the late Middle Ages until the middle of the twentieth century the predominant emphasis had been on the uniqueness of Mary and the privileges that set her apart from all other children of Eve. The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption were solemnly proclaimed by Pius IX and Pius XII respectively. Following the definition of the Assumption in 1950 there was a flurry of speculation about possible new titles for Mary, for example, Mediatrix of all Graces and Co-redemptrix.

This trend, however, raised questions in the minds of reflective theologians. After the proclamation of the new dogmas, the principal need seemed to be not to add new titles but rather to discern the intelligibility and religious significance of what had already been defined. Karl Rahner called for a new phase in the development of Christian doctrine, "development in the line of simplification."<sup>1</sup> He and other theologians in the 1950s tried to discover what they called the fundamental principle of Mariology. While recognizing that the divine motherhood was historically the first Marian dogma, Rahner contended that the single formula that best

\*Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., is the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham University. He has published over twenty-five major works on ecclesiology, apologetics, and ecumenism; his most recent work is *Newman* (Continuum, 2002). For more information, cf. [www.fordham.edu/dulles](http://www.fordham.edu/dulles).

<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, "Considerations on the Development of Dogma," in his *Theological Investigations* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), 4:3-35, at 26.

summarized Mary's place in God's plan was that of being the most perfect Christian, the one most perfectly redeemed. All of Mary's prerogatives, he maintained, expressed graces to which all Christians must aspire.<sup>2</sup>

In the decade preceding Vatican II two dominant tendencies emerged. The first of these—sometimes called “Christotypical”—linked Mary with Christ the Redeemer and situated her at a point prior to the Church. Edward Schillebeeckx, in his *Mary, Mother of the Redemption* (Dutch original, 1954), contended that Mary's motherhood was the foundation of all her privileges. That motherhood, he explained, was not merely physical; it involved her personal acceptance of her own vocation. Mary, therefore, was preeminently the woman of faith.<sup>3</sup>

The second tendency, often called “ecclesiotypical,” presents Mary as archetype of the Church. Rahner's position, as already described, belongs to this category, since it situates Mary among us who are redeemed. Otto Semmelroth, a German Jesuit contemporary with Rahner, held that, as Second Eve and Bride of the eternal Logos, Mary exemplifies the mystical union between Christ and the Church. Like the Church, Mary receives the fruits of Christ's redeeming work both for herself and for others. She is thus the type of the Church, which both receives and transmits salvation.<sup>4</sup>

Henri de Lubac in one of his early works, *The Splendor of the Church* (French original, 1953),<sup>5</sup> concluded with a chapter on “The Church and Our Lady,” in which he described Mary as the first cell of the organism of the Church (339). If the Church is virgin and bride, he said, Mary preeminently deserves these titles as well as those of Mother of Christ and sacrament of our redemption (340). She comprises in surpassing measure all the graces and perfections of the Church (342). Under one aspect

<sup>2</sup>Karl Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), esp. chap. 2, “The Fundamental Idea of Mariology,” 32-41.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1964), 104-9.

<sup>4</sup>Otto Semmelroth, *Mary, Archetype of the Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 89 et passim.

<sup>5</sup>Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986).

she is the Church's daughter, but at an even deeper level she may be called its Mother (334).

These schools were mutually critical. Schillebeeckx, without denying that Mary is the prototype of the Church, held that this formula failed to bring out the unique relationship of Mary to Christ the God-man, who was the head of the humanity he was called to redeem.<sup>6</sup> Rahner, speaking for the ecclesiotypical school, said that the emphasis on Mary as mother of the Redeemer could seem to suggest that she stands in a purely private relationship to Christ that would not be of concern to the rest of us, the great company of the redeemed.<sup>7</sup>

With this background it is possible to understand the divisions of opinion at the Second Vatican Council. When the Fathers assembled in the Fall of 1962, they were presented with a draft document on the Blessed Virgin Mary as Mother of God and our Mother. After some debate they were asked to vote as to whether to treat the Virgin Mary in a separate document or to integrate Mariology into the Constitution on the Church. By a very slim majority (1114 to 1074) the proposal for integration was accepted. The Council's teaching on Mary was then added to the Constitution on the Church as an eighth chapter. Reflecting the influence of the biblical and ecumenical movements, this chapter tended to bridle the zeal for new definitions. Although 300 bishops had petitioned for a definition of Mary's unique mediatorship of grace, the Council contented itself with mentioning that Mary is invoked in the Church by a number of titles including "advocate, benefactress, helper, and mediatrix" (no. 62). Inclining toward the ecclesiocentric view, which situates Mary on the side of the redeemed community, the document refrained from calling Mary "Mother of the Church," although a number of bishops had asked that she be so designated.

Paul VI, at the end of the third session, in November 1964, gave an allocution to the Council Fathers in which he praised the Council for having presented "in a vast synthesis what Catholic doctrine teaches on the place to be attributed to the

<sup>6</sup>Schillebeeckx, *Mary*, 106-7.

<sup>7</sup>Rahner, *Mary Mother of the Lord*, 33.

Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of Christ." Apparently hoping to assuage the disappointment of those bishops whose petitions had been rejected, the Pope declared that Mary did indeed deserve to be called "Mother of the Church."<sup>8</sup> He made it clear in this connection that Mary's motherhood extended to the Church as a people, not to the institutional elements.<sup>9</sup> A number of the ecumenically oriented theologians, along with some Protestant observers, criticized the Pope for going beyond the teaching of the Council.<sup>10</sup> Paul VI, however, was convinced that in his capacity as Pope he was not bound to restrict himself to what the Council chose to say. In his "Credo of the People of God" (1968), Paul VI again referred to Mary as "Mother of the Church."<sup>11</sup>

The achievements of Vatican II have been called a watershed. The chapter on Mary in the Constitution on the Church seemed to mark the end of an isolated, maximizing Mariology, and the inclusion of Mary in the theology of the Church. But the period immediately following the Council did not confirm the fruitfulness of this approach. It has been called "a decade without Mary." One theologian wrote in 1978: "It is surprising that the conciliar innovation found no answering echo in the Church. Mariology and Marian devotion are disturbingly close to nil. The choral praise of the Mother of God in the days of Pius XII has been succeeded by a deep silence."<sup>12</sup>

Hans Küng applauded and abetted this Marian recession. After censuring the recent popes for having promoted Marian devotion by every means, he praised Vatican II for having in-

<sup>8</sup>Paul VI, "Allocution to the Council Fathers" of November 21, 1964, in AAS 56 (1964): 1007-18. For the quoted excerpt, see *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Jacques Dupuis (6th ed.; New York: Alba House, 1996), no. 718b, p. 268.

<sup>9</sup>See Jorge Medina Estevez, "The Blessed Virgin," in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1966), 301-15, 310; cf. 327.

<sup>10</sup>See George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 204-7, for continuing criticism.

<sup>11</sup>*The Christian Faith* (ed. Dupuis), no. 39/8, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup>Wilhelm Beinert, quoted by Stefano De Fiore, "Mary in Postconciliar Theology," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, ed. René Latourelle (3 vols.; New York: Paulist, 1988-1989), 1:469-539, at 474.

tegrated Mariology into the last chapter of its document on the Church and for having unmistakably condemned the excesses of Marianism. Since the Council, he declared, this exaggerated Marian cult had completely lost its force both in theology and in the life of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

Vatican II in its Decree on Ecumenism formulated the principle of the "hierarchy of truths" (UR 11). This principle led to some discussion about where the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption would fall in the hierarchy. If they ranked relatively low, one might legitimately ask whether it was necessary to exact explicit adherence to these dogmas as a condition for ecclesial communion. Could the anathemas attached to these dogmas be withdrawn, allowing the dogmas themselves to stand?<sup>14</sup> I myself was among those who raised the question. While this proposal would be welcomed by non-Catholic Christians, it seemed to undermine the binding force of defined dogmas and could be exploited by Marian minimalists to promote their negative agenda.

About the time when devotion to Mary reached its nadir, Paul VI advanced a fresh approach in his apostolic exhortation *Marialis cultus* (1974).<sup>15</sup> He proposes a number of theological principles, including a trinitarian and Christological focus, attention to the relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit, and recognition of Mary as a model or type of the Church. The Pope then adds four practical guidelines referring respectively to Scripture, liturgy, ecumenism, and anthropology. He prescribes that a biblical imprint should be maintained and that Marian devotion should harmonize with the liturgy. With a view to ecumenism he specifies that Catholics should avoid exaggerations that might mislead members of other churches about the true doctrine of the Catholic Church. Under the anthropological rubric he recommends that close attention should be paid to the findings of the human sciences. Certain types of

<sup>13</sup>Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 461-62.

<sup>14</sup>On this question see Avery Dulles, "A Proposal to Lift Two Anathemas," *Origins* 4 (December 26, 1974): 417-21.

<sup>15</sup>Eng. trans., *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1974); excerpts in *Origins* 3 (April 4, 1974): 633-38.

devotional literature, he notes, present Mary in a sentimental manner that cannot easily be reconciled with today's life style, in which women frequently hold positions equal to those of men in employment and public life. Our contemporaries, he maintains, can best appreciate Mary as a strong woman who made courageous choices and became an active witness in building up the apostolic community in faith (nos. 34-36).

Much of the finest work in Catholic Mariology spans the periods before and after Vatican II, without being notably impacted by the Council. Hans Urs von Balthasar developed themes similar to those of de Lubac, already mentioned. In a preconiliar essay "Who Is the Church?" he pointed out that while the Church has a hierarchical and sacramental structure that mediates truth and grace, its innermost nature consists in a nuptial relationship with God. The Church is essentially bride. The masculine dimension of official ministry is subservient to the feminine dimension of active receptivity. In Scripture and theology the institutional structure is represented by Peter, but the fruitful receptivity is typified by Mary, in whom the Church becomes the glorious bride. Having given birth to her Son both physically and spiritually, Mary then becomes the universal Mother of all believers. By reason of her virginal faith and fruitfulness, she is the prototype of the Church.<sup>16</sup>

In his multivolume *The Glory of the Lord*, which began to appear on the eve of Vatican II, Balthasar further develops his biblical typology. He distinguishes four archetypal experiences that coalesce in the Church: the Petrine, representing hierarchical office; the Pauline, representing charismatic mission; the Johannine, representing contemplative love; and the Marian, representing virginal fruitfulness. The Marian experience, he asserts, is more fundamental than the other three. It surpasses and undergirds the apostolic experience in all three of its aspects (Petrine, Pauline, and Johannine).<sup>17</sup> Mary as type of the Church, for Balthasar, is more than a mere symbolic anti-

<sup>16</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Who Is the Church?," in his *Explorations in Theology. II. Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 143-91, esp. 157-66.

<sup>17</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. I. Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 338-65.

pation of what takes place in the Church. Her obedient consent has archetypal efficacy for salvation.<sup>18</sup>

In an extended section on Mary in his *Theo-drama* (German original, 1978), Balthasar denies the possibility of finding a single fundamental principle from which all aspects of Mariology could be derived. The characterization of Mary as type of the Church, taken alone, tends to absorb her into the anonymous community of the redeemed. The more personally and uniquely her relation to the triune God is envisaged, the more clearly does she exhibit the quintessence of the Church. Because of her singular bridal relationship to the eternal Word, she is uniquely fruitful as Mother of Christ and of Christians.<sup>19</sup>

While Balthasar expressed reservations about a merely ecclesiotypical Mariology, John Paul II was formed from the beginning in the Christotypical mold. As a boy he frequented with his father the great Marian shrines of Poland. During the Second World War he joined a "living rosary" to pray for his country. As a young layman he also read the works of St. Louis Grignon de Montfort, from whom he learned that true devotion to the Mother of God is actually Christocentric, since it is rooted in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption.<sup>20</sup> In 1958, when named a bishop, he placed on his coat of arms the words *Totus tuus*, "totally yours" (i.e., Mary's). This motto is an abbreviation of a prayer, composed by Saint Louis Grignon de Montfort, which reads: "I am totally yours (*totus tuus ego sum*) and all that is mine is yours. I accept you in all that is mine. Offer me your heart, O Mary."<sup>21</sup>

At Vatican II, Bishop Wojtyla was not opposed to the inclusion of Mary in the document on the Church, but he asked that the chapter on Mary be placed not at the end, where it might appear as a mere appendix, but immediately after the first chapter describing the Mystery of the Church. Mary, he pointed

<sup>18</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 196-212, esp. 199.

<sup>19</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 3. *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 283-360.

<sup>20</sup>John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 213.

<sup>21</sup>John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 29-30.



out, having built up Christ's physical body, performs the same office toward the Church as Mystical Body, and thus becomes Mother of the Church.<sup>22</sup> These suggestions would have involved a more drastic revision of the document on the Church than the Council thought feasible, but if they had been implemented, the Council would not have been subject to the charge of minimizing the role and importance of Mary. As Pope, John Paul II has not publicly criticized Vatican II. Indeed he has called chapter eight of *Lumen gentium* "in a certain sense a *magna charta* of the Mariology of our era."<sup>23</sup>

In the Marian year 1987, John Paul II issued the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, in which he synthesizes the essentials of his Marian doctrine. Like Saint Louis Grignion de Montfort, he insists that Mary cannot be rightly understood except in the light of Christ, toward whom her entire life was directed and from whom she received all that made her great and glorious. As he says more than once in *Redemptoris Mater*, "Only in the mystery of Christ is her mystery made clear" (RM 4; cf. 19).

The title of the encyclical also points to what John Paul II regards as the fundamental source of Mary's dignity: her role as Mother of the eternal Son. This dogma, defined by the Council of Ephesus in 431, is a bond of union between Eastern and Western Christianity. The Pope notes with satisfaction that Mary is hailed in the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom as higher than the cherubim and more glorious than the seraphim (RM 31-32).<sup>24</sup>

The Pope, of course, does not deny that Mary is a type of the Church. Several times in his encyclical he speaks of Mary as the

<sup>22</sup>See Wojtyla's written intervention of September 1964 in Vatican II, *Acta Synodalia* (hereafter AS) III/2, 178-79; also the submission of the bishops of Poland, of about the same date, in AS II/3, 856-57.

<sup>23</sup>John Paul II, Discourse at General Audience of May 2, 1979; *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng. language edition) 9 May 1979, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>The English-speaking reader will at this point be reminded of the hymn of John A. L. Riley, "Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones," which depicts Mary as leading the chorus of angels:

O higher than the cherubim,  
More glorious than the seraphim,  
Lead their praises, Alleluia!  
Thou bearer of th'eternal Word,  
Most gracious, magnify the Lord, Alleluia!

model for the Church in its pilgrimage of faith (RM 5-6; 25). Already at the Annunciation she had to believe, contrary to appearances, that God's promises to her would come to pass. At the Visitation Elizabeth saluted her with the words, "Blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled." Mary's faith was to be severely tested on many occasions, beginning with the Flight into Egypt and the Loss and Finding in the Temple. The supreme test of Mary's faith was undoubtedly the Crucifixion. The Pope then adds: "This is perhaps the deepest 'kenosis' of faith in human history" (RM 18).

The spiritual motherhood of Mary, which lies at the very heart of the encyclical, is presented as the source of her mediatorial role. At the wedding feast at Cana she "places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs, and sufferings" (RM 21). Her mediation takes the form of intercession. In directing the servants at the banquet to obey her Son, Mary presents herself as the spokeswoman of his will.

To guard yet further against any tendency to place Mary on a par with Christ, the Pope quotes from Vatican II the statement, "Mary's maternal function toward mankind in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power" (LG 60; cf. RM 38). Her mediation is simply a participation in that of Christ, who is described in Scripture as our one mediator with God (1 Tim 2:5). Later in the encyclical, the Pope gratefully recalls the action by which Paul VI conferred upon Mary the title of Mother of the Church (RM 47). As that title suggests, she is more than a model or exemplar. She actually cooperates in the birth and development of the Church. She is intimately associated with the Eucharist in which the body born from her womb becomes present anew. For this reason, all disciples of Christ should have a Marian dimension in their lives. Like John, they should welcome Mary and take her into their personal history (RM 45).

John Paul II amplified his teaching about Mary in a series of seventy General Audience talks delivered from September 1995 to November 1997, recently published in a single volume in English.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>John Paul II, *Theotokos: Woman, Mother, Disciple: A Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2000).

In these "catecheses" the Pope characteristically emphasizes the unique proximity of Mary to her divine Son and her maternal relationship to the Church. Totally subordinate to Christ as her Savior, she is a model for all Christians in her faith and discipleship.

In the remainder of my address I should like to summarize several trends that you, as a Society, might wish to study and appraise, if you have not already done so. Here in the United States, a group calling itself *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici*, headed by Mark Miravalle, a lay professor of theology at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, has been gathering signatures for a dogmatic definition, officially conferring upon Mary the titles (1) "Co-redemptrix," (2) "Mediatrice of all graces," and (3) "Advocate of the people of God."

The third of these titles is unproblematical, but it seems to contain no substantive teaching beyond what is obvious to all Catholics, namely that Mary is a heavenly helper. The second title, "Mediatrice of all graces" is well established in the tradition, though it fell out of favor during the years of Vatican II and Paul VI. The title does raise theological questions. For example: how could Mary mediate to herself the graces she received?

The first title, "Co-redemptrix," is the most problematical. After being occasionally used by Pius XI, the title was studiously avoided by Pius XII and Paul VI, and is absent from the documents of Vatican II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. But the title reappears, with careful explanations, in some speeches of John Paul II. While Mary's close association with Jesus on the Cross should not be called into question, many theologians are reluctant to attribute objective redemption to anyone but Christ, who himself was not redeemed. Mary, however, belongs to the company of the redeemed. If the term "redemptrix" is applied to Mary in some qualified sense, it requires a great deal of explanation. For this reason the term may not be found suitable for solemn proclamation.<sup>26</sup>

In North and South America, significant efforts have been made to develop new lines of thinking about Mary in re-

<sup>26</sup>For my own reflections on the three proposed titles see Avery Dulles, "Mary at the Dawn of the New Millennium," *America* 178 (January 31-February 7, 1998): 8-10, 12-16, 18-19.

sponse to current social and political conditions. The Latin American bishops in their Puebla document of 1979 gave an original application to the ideas of Mary as mother and model of the Church. Her feminine presence, they declared, "creates the family atmosphere, receptivity, love, and respect for life; a sacramental presence of the maternal features of God; and a reality so deeply human and holy that it evokes from believers supplications rooted in tenderness, suffering, and hope."<sup>27</sup>

Again at Santo Domingo in 1992, the Latin American bishops exalted Mary as a woman of faith, the most perfect disciple and evangelizer. They singled out her apparition at Guadalupe as a model of inculturated evangelization.<sup>28</sup>

A number of liberation theologians have found revolutionary implications in the Magnificat. The thanksgiving and joy of this hymn, says Gustavo Gutiérrez, "are closely linked to the action of God who liberates the oppressed and humbles the powerful. 'The hungry he has satisfied with good things, the rich sent empty away' (Lk 1:52-53). The future of history belongs to the poor and exploited. True liberation will be the work of the oppressed themselves; in them, the Lord saves history."<sup>29</sup> Passages such as these may have motivated the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in 1984 to warn against a political reading of the Magnificat that would intensify the class struggle and justify violence.<sup>30</sup>

Another liberation theologian, the Brazilian Leonardo Boff, has proposed an exceptionally high Mariology. In a work significantly entitled *The Maternal Face of God* he argues that Mary in her Assumption was taken up into the inner life of the godhead, so that C. J. Jung was at least partly justified in claiming that the definition of the Assumption supplied the "missing

<sup>27</sup>*Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops* (Puebla, 1979), *Conclusions* (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979), no. 291, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup>*Santo Domingo and Beyond: Documents and Commentaries*, ed. Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), no. 15, pp. 76-77.

<sup>29</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, fifteenth anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 120.

<sup>30</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation.'" *Origins* 14 (September 13, 1984): 193-204, esp. sec. X,5 at 202.

fourth" in the classical doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>31</sup> Although Mary is not herself God, says Boff, she entered "indirectly but truly" into the hypostatic union by virtue of the Incarnation (163). In an italicized statement that summarizes the thesis of his book, Boff proposes as his hypothesis that the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of all men and women, realizes the feminine absolutely and eschatologically, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit has made her his temple, sanctuary, and tabernacle in so real and genuine a way that she is to be regarded as hypostatically united to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity (93).

Feminist theology in other parts of the world is predominantly hostile to the tendency to divinize Mary. The Norwegian Kari Elisabeth Børresen, writing in *Concilium* in 1983, speaks for many women in branding Boff's idea of the feminine face of God as a heretical deviation. On the ground that Mary represents the subordinate female partner in the scheme of salvation, Børresen rejects Mary as a possible model for women who aspire to equality.<sup>32</sup>

Somewhere in between the high Mariology of Boff and the critical Mariology of Børresen is the position of the American feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson. She is critical of Boff for seeking to divinize Mary and of some statements of John Paul II, which, in her view, use Mary ideologically in order to stereotype and domesticate women.<sup>33</sup> She takes comfort, however, in the Marian encyclical of Paul VI, which recognized the emergence of women into all aspects of public life.<sup>34</sup> She herself proposes a Mariology from below, situating Mary within the

<sup>31</sup>Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and Its Religious Expressions* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 227-41. For a comparable approach from North America see Andrew M. Greeley, *The Mary Myth: On the Femininity of God* (New York: Seabury/Crossroad, 1977). Boff dismisses Greeley's work as "a disappointing book that constantly and abusively confuses the biographical first person with the epistemological," *Maternal Face*, 266, n. 37.

<sup>32</sup>Kari Børresen, "Mary in Catholic Theology," in *Mary in the Churches*, ed. Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann, *Concilium* 168 (New York: Seabury, 1983), 48-56.

<sup>33</sup>Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Toward a Theology of Mary: Past, Present, Future," in *All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, Penn.: Villanova University Press, 1994), 1-38, at 13.

<sup>34</sup>Johnson, "Toward," 15.

community of the disciples. Following Rosemary Radford Ruether, she finds that Mary can be seen as heralding a revolution in which oppressed women can overcome their lack of self-esteem and begin to form a genuine community of discipleship among equals.<sup>35</sup>

Professor Johnson's Mariology will no doubt be clarified in her forthcoming book. In the meantime it may be described as being marked by certain inner tensions. While denying that the Mary of history is an archetype, she adverts to the symbolic power of Mary as a creative model of holiness. She is reticent in invoking the Church's dogmatic heritage, yet she acknowledges that the ancient doctrines of Mary's motherhood and virginity, together with the modern dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, can be seen as mysteries filled with meaning for the whole Church. While holding that all Christians are called through grace to ultimate glory, she recognizes that "the mystery of victorious grace is made uniquely manifest" in the virgin Mother of the Lord.<sup>36</sup> It is precisely this uniqueness, I believe, that needs to be emphasized if Mary's significance is to be properly understood.

In the last analysis, as Karl Rahner once observed, Catholic Mariology depends upon the Christological dogma. If that dogma is taken seriously, Mary will be seen as being in truth the Mother of God. Because she opened the door of the world for the definitive coming of the redeeming God into the flesh of our humanity, she has an altogether singular position in God's saving plan.<sup>37</sup>

There can be no cleavage between the Mary of history and the Mary of dogma. By a neglect of history one can open the path to a divinized Mary in whom mythical projection overcomes theology. By a neglect of dogma one can deprive Mary of her distinctive role in salvation history and reduce her to the common level of our humanity.

Before concluding I should briefly note the resurgence of interest in Mary in ecumenical circles. In the wake of Vatican II,

<sup>35</sup>Johnson, "Toward," 22.

<sup>36</sup>Johnson, "Toward," 31.

<sup>37</sup>Karl Rahner, "The Immaculate Conception," in his *Theological Investigations* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), 1:201-14; especially 202-3.

it was generally thought that Mary was a major obstacle to union, especially between Protestants and Catholics. But in recent years, some Protestants have shown great interest in revitalizing Marian belief and piety in their own communities. Several new ecumenical Mariological societies were founded, and many ecumenical conferences on Mary have been held. Non-Catholic theologians of great distinction have sought to make the case for dogmas such as the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. At an International Marian Congress held in Malta in 1983, theologians of the Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Orthodox, and Catholic communions signed a declaration recognizing Mary's singular role in the communion of saints. This declaration was then unanimously endorsed by the United States chapter of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Other events are likewise promising. On June 9-11 this year, the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology in Northfield, Minnesota, will sponsor a conference titled "Mary, Mother of God" that will bring together scholars from many traditions to "celebrate Mary's singular dignity within the mystery of salvation." It seems possible that in the future Mary may prove to be a catalyst leading to greater understanding and reconciliation among separated Christians, not only Orthodox and Catholic but also Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed.

The Council was indeed a watershed. It solidified the achievements of earlier centuries. Putting an end to an isolated Mariology, it effectively linked the mystery of Mary with the theology of Christ and the Church. It opened up a new era of ecumenical Mariology. The decline in the decade following the Council appears to have been a temporary aberration, not warranted by the conciliar pronouncements. The increasing prominence of the Virgin Mother in recent theological literature indicates that her role in Christian faith and piety is permanent and irreplaceable.

---

N.B. In this article I have reproduced some sections of my earlier essay "Mary in Relation to Christ and the Church," in Florinda M. Iannace, ed., *Maria Vergine nella Letteratura italiana* (Stony Brook, N.Y.: Forum Italicum Publishing, 2000), 15-26.