



Ecumenical Dimensions and Potential of Vatican II's Statement on Mary¹

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The popes of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) clearly signaled the importance of Mary to the process of Catholic renewal. The Council opened on what was the feast of Divine Maternity honoring Mary, Mother of God, on October 11, 1962, and closed on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1965. In the preceding centuries the Catholic Church's relationship with the world had become fraught, leading it to roundly condemn excesses and

¹ I would like to thank Sarah Boss, former director of the Centre for Marian Studies, UK, for providing insightful feedback on an earlier version of this paper.

The deliberations about Mary and Marian piety at the Second Vatican Council were aimed at a renewal and reformation of traditional Roman Catholic doctrine and practices. Yet the Council's decisions were also meant as an ecumenical outreach to other Christians through the person of Mary. Discussions about Mary can be seen as an invitation to all to explore our common faith and personhood.

aberrations of modernity. In January 1959, three months after his election as pope, John XXIII called a Council of the Catholic Church. The aim was to rehabilitate the Church's relationship with the world through constructive engagement. The Church was to present to modernity the substance of the ancient doctrine of the faith in a new way. In his homily to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the close of the Council, Pope Benedict XVI, who as Joseph Ratzinger was a *peritus*, or advisor, at the Council, spoke of the Marian setting and orientation of the Council which continues to direct the Church.² Vatican II's text on Mary was a conscious renewal of theological consideration of Mary, Mother of God, set within a Council which explicitly sought a reengagement with the world. In that pivot to the world, ecumenical concerns were at the core of its considerations and final documents.³ These ecumenical concerns most clearly manifested themselves in a return to the sources of Christian faith, Scripture, and the church fathers moving away from neo-scholasticism and speculative theology. In relation to Mary, ecumenical concerns expressed themselves in the rejection of additional titles for Mary (Orthodox) and the inclusion of Mary in the Council's document on the Church (Protestantism).

Vatican II's text on Mary describes her as did the church fathers: Mary is type of the Church.⁴ Ratzinger argues that this title was one of the most important theological rediscoveries of the twentieth century.⁵ Mary is the personal personification of the Church. In that way, it is a presentation of Catholic ecclesiology. Mary personifies the Church cooperating in a "servant-like way" with God. Mary's yes to God at the annunciation is critical to this interpretation, for it is the prelude

² Benedict XVI, *Cappella Papale on the 40th Anniversary of the Closure of the Second Vatican Council: Homily of His Holiness Benedict, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, December 8, 2005, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20051208_anniv-vat-council.html.

³ For consideration of Vatican II's text on Mary, see *Marian Studies* 37, no. 1 (1987), https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol37/iss1/.

⁴ "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church," in *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution of the Church* (1964), §§ 52–69, 53; 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*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimmler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), 1:285–96.

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 356.

to the incarnation of the Word. What is evident is that the issue of Mary is the issue of ecclesiology, so a renewal of the Catholic Church's teaching on Mary will always reflect ecclesiology. What also becomes evident is that the renewal of that teaching through Scripture and the church fathers provides a bridge between Catholics and Protestants not just on Mary but through Mary on ecclesiology. Ecumenical dialogue on Mary based on the interpretation of Scripture offers new dynamism for dialogue on the Church. A scriptural interpretation of Mary, her life as Mother of God, offers a shared basis of Christian ecclesiology. In the concrete person of Mary, in how she lived her life for God, in her deep knowledge of Scripture evident from the Magnificat, in her fear of God but also her dialogue with God in which she asked questions—"How can that be?"—ahead of declaring her yes; in her subsequent pondering of all these things, holding them together, allowing God's message to unfold in her life; in being dragged by her family to admonish Jesus for embarrassing them with his antics; in standing at the foot of the cross; in praying among the apostles, waiting for the Holy Spirit—in all these things we see the essence of the Church who, as Vatican II stated, is not only the body of Christ as the people of God but is analogous with the incarnate Word.⁶

The issues of ecumenism and Mary in Christian faith and theology were intertwined at Vatican II.⁷ In Ratzinger's contemporaneous reports of each of the four sessions of the Council, he described ecumenism as the leitmotiv of the Council—a leitmotiv that expressed itself in "a new and serious consideration of all problems involving the separated brethren." Ecumenism, Ratzinger contended, meant acknowledging and addressing "mistakes of the past" so that barriers in the way of unity could be dismantled.⁸ Equally, ecumenism was not the avoidance of issues. "What is true must be said openly and without concealment; full truth is part of full love." Ecumenism recognizes in non-Catholics fellow Christians, not adversaries; brothers to whom we speak and from whom we can learn. Ecumenism means listening and being challenged about the concerns of others. It means sharing

⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, §§ 1–17, 8.

⁷ Peter Seewald, *Benedict XVI: A Life, Vol. 1, Youth in Nazi Germany to the Second Vatican Council 1927–1965*, trans. Dinah Livingstone (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2020), 307–463.

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. Gerard C. Thormann (New York: Paulist, 1966), 140–43, 140.

the fullness of Catholicism which “clearly contains all that is truly Christian,” and being Catholic means being “open to the fullness of Christianity.”⁹ The problem of Mariology, as Ratzinger put it, was a central aspect of the question of ecumenism. Addressing the “serious questions involved” in Catholic Mariology with its then emphasis on titles such as co-redemptrix and mediatrix, which had at that time the authority of papal teachings and where other voices were “pretty much silenced,” meant taking a “sober and definite stand on the basis of biblical testimony.”¹⁰

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The impact of the Second Vatican Council on ecumenical dialogue on Mary is significant. According to Tim Perry in *Mary for Evangelists*, it provided Protestant theology the impetus to reconsider the Mother of God, the fruit of which is evident in official and semi-official dialogues with Catholic scholars that sought to establish what was held in common and to consider the meaning of the differences of thought on Mary in relation to Christ and the Church. Important examples for Perry were *Mary in the New Testament*, edited by Raymond Brown et al. (1978); *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary: Lutheran and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, edited by H. George Anderson et al. (1992); *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of the Saints: Toward a Common Christian Understanding*, by Alain Blancy et al. (2002); the publications of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1968–); *Mary: Mother of God*, edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (2004); and *Mary: A Catholic-Evangelical Debate*, by Dwight Longenecker and David Gustafson (2004). These engagements between Protestant and Catholic scholars in Perry’s

⁹ Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 46.

¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 140, 143.

view “would have been practically impossible prior to Vatican II.”¹¹ In parallel to this engagement, feminist theology and liberation theology (re)appropriated Marian theology, leading to diversity of Marian theology across Catholic theology. Perry refers to Elizabeth Johnson, Tina Beattie, Leonardo Boff, and Tissa Balasuriya as examples of diversity. The diversity of views on Mary offers both opportunities and challenges. In Perry’s view, in which he explicitly aligns himself with Pope Paul VI, diversity is not the destination. It is only a stage in the journey toward a fuller comprehension of “the one truth about this singular woman.”¹²

Perry notes that a comprehensive Protestant Mariology has yet to be undertaken. He contends that in such an endeavor, Holy Scripture acts as the guiding principle, and the inevitability of the development of doctrine would be accepted. Developments of doctrine, whether related to Mary or other doctrine, should be assessed by three questions: Is this development, although overlooked by previous generations, explicitly taught in Holy Scripture? Is this development implicitly taught in Holy Scripture? Is this development logically related to other doctrines explicitly or implicitly taught in Holy Scripture? Specifically in relation to Mary, Perry adds two additional guiding principles: First, Protestant theologians should reflect on titles such as co-redemptrix, mediatrix, and advocate in relation to the three questions just outlined. Second, the person of Mary evident in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew should be given greater emphasis; in that way, the symbolic Mary evident in the Gospels of Luke and John is appropriately rebalanced.¹³ Perry’s Protestant Mariology understands Mary within and “beneath the rubric of Christology.” From there, important beliefs emerge, such as the virginal conception. This does not mean an end to or a de-Reformation view of Mary. It looks to remove polemic to drive out clarity on shared belief “in order to prayerfully set those disagreements before the one who prayed that we might be one.”¹⁴

The question that remains to be answered is: To what extent do the ecumenical dimensions of the Council’s statement on Mary create

¹¹ Tim Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals: Toward an Understanding of the Mother of Our Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 258–60..

¹² Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 250–62.

¹³ Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 262–63.

¹⁴ Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 308.

impulses toward or away from ecumenicism? Taking the impulses toward ecumenical dialogue on Mary first, the return to the sources as the foundations of Catholic teaching on Mary reestablishes common ground on Mary upon Scripture and the church fathers. In so doing, ecumenical contention is then moved to issues of scriptural interpretation and the development of doctrine. From a Catholic perspective, biblical interpretation is set within the context of revelation. As reasserted by the Council's document on revelation, *Dei Verbum*, Jesus is God's revelation, and revelation is carried in the two sources of Scripture and tradition. There are four core elements to Catholic biblical interpretation. First is the unity of Bible with the one voice, God's, running through it. Second, the Old Testament is interpreted through the New Testament. Or in other words, Scripture is interpreted in the light of Christ. Third, just as was done by Israel, typology is utilized to interpret the figures of the New Testament. Types are foreshadowed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament, the Adam–Second Adam type and the Eve–Mary/Church type being preeminent. Forth, the historical-critical method is an important method of interpretation which is used in parallel to and in support of the other three methods.¹⁵ That latter method must remain history, never inadvertently operating as philosophy, and can never take the place of faith when engaging the Bible. History interprets history and stands alongside the question of faith.¹⁶ The issue of biblical interpretation opens or closes the door to theological interpretation of Mary. For example, to say Mary is immaculate, that she is preserved from sin, depends on the interpretative methods and tools used. Perry argues that the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception is a postbiblical

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Sign of the Woman," in *Mary: God's Yes to Man: John Paul's Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Mater* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 11–14, 9–40. Also see Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xix–xx, 40–41.

¹⁶ To address issues with the historical-critical method, I outline seven principles of a Theological Historical Method in my article "Benedict XVI and Edith Stein on Faith," in *Joseph Ratzinger in Dialogue with Philosophical Traditions: From Plato to Vattimo*, ed. Alejandro Sada and Tracey Rowland (London, T&T Clark, 2023). For a discussion of the problems with the historical-critical method, see my book *Innovation within Tradition: Joseph Ratzinger and Reading the Women of Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 112–34; For a description of history as relational and particular, see my article "The Female Line in the Bible: Ratzinger's Deepening of the Church's Understanding of Tradition and Mary," *Religions* 11, no. 6 (2020): 310.

legend about Mary's beginning.¹⁷ If Mary is interpreted as type and personal personification of the Church, then because what is said of Mary is said of the Church and vice versa, Mary is immaculate just as the Church is immaculate.¹⁸

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Pope Paul VI's addition of the title Mother of the Church to the Council's statement on Mary at first glance creates an additional barrier to shared ecumenical understanding on Mary. Yet Cathy Jones has shown that the debate on the matter runs across denominational lines. Supporters of the title Mother of the Church include Protestant theologians such as John Macquarrie who see it having firm scriptural foundations. Macquarrie argues that "the best clue to the interpretation of [Mary's] place in the New Testament is afforded by the title Mother of the Church."¹⁹ Others (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) see the title as continuing the problematic Marian displacement of functions rightly ascribed to the Holy Spirit (e.g., Orthodox theologian Nikos Nissiotis, Anglican Philip Pare, and Protestant Elsie Gibson). Jones refers to this as "Pneumatological Marian displacement" or, per Rene Laurentin, "Pneumatological recentring."²⁰ Laurentin, who as an advisor to the Council's preparatory Theological Commission advocated against the title Mother of the Church, follows Heribert Mühlen, noting that such attributes should not be condemned. Mary is to be situated in relation to the Holy Spirit.²¹ "When it is said that Mary has given us Christ at the incarnation, do we not too often

¹⁷ Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 307.

¹⁸ Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, trans. Sebastian Bullough (Bethesda: Zaccheus, 2004).

¹⁹ John Macquarrie, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1966), 353.

²⁰ Cathy Jones, "Pneumatological Recentring of Mary's Ecclesial Motherhood," in *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2023) 1, 8–9.

²¹ Jones, "Pneumatological Recentring of Mary's Ecclesial motherhood," 7, note 31.

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?"²² Jones argues that the use of the title for both Mary and the Church points to their integral connection. It offers opportunity "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."²³ Perry, for his part, argues that the title Mary, Mother of the Church is "a non-biblical, nonpatristic title imposed by papal decree."²⁴ Yet, something else emerges when the title is considered in light of how the title was first used by Berengarius/Berengaud of Tours (early twelfth century). He used it in relation to Pauline ecclesiology.

In such interpretation, the title Mother of the Church can be considered at least an implicit, if not explicit, Pauline teaching: Christ the Head forms a single subject with the body, the Church. As the Mother of the Head, she is also Mother of the body, the Church. In declaring Mary the Mother of the Church, Paul VI instigated a critical development of Christology, ecclesiology, and Marian thought that lies dormant within Scripture and tradition. The fact that this is a late development within tradition does not negate its efficacy—it is like the infant growing and maturing. It is the same type of title ascribed to Mary as *Hodegetria*, she who shows the way. Indeed, Mary is Mother of the Church because she showed the way. It is the very thing that Perry seeks when looking for the person of Mary to rebalance the symbol of Mary. In moving the contention on Mary to biblical interpretation, it is very possible that from the reestablished basis of shared belief in Mary in Scripture along with shared tools of biblical interpretation, significant convergence on Mary emerges among Christian brothers and sisters. This convergence may be more manifest among Catholics and Protestants given that the term Mother of the Church is explicitly found in the West but not the East. In this regard, Justin

²² Jones, "Pneumatological Recentring of Mary's Ecclesial motherhood," 11. Reference Rene 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, OH, 1966, Box 1.

²³ Jones, "Pneumatological Recentring of Mary's Ecclesial Motherhood," 12.

²⁴ Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 248, note 43. Perry draws on Edward Schillebeeckx, "Mariology: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow," in Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (New York, Crossroad, 1993), 15-16.

Kalan's reading, in light of Fr. Francis Maloney's commentary, of the Greek phrase "into his home," εἰς τὰ ἴδια (John 1; 16; 19), is insightful. In recognizing the divine Logos, through whom the world was created, and accepting that divine Logos into both our public and private life, we are no longer creatures of God, but children of God. God is our Father. There are profound Marian implications in the recognition and acceptance of the divine Logos into our lives. "Faith in Christ thus brings us into relationship with God our Father and also implies that we must accept Jesus's mother as our mother too."²⁵

Advisors at the Council who were in principle against additional titles based on ecumenical and theological grounds ensured an ecumenically sensitive approach to the Council's statement on Mary. Yet the principle "No new titles" can act as a barrier to appropriate deepening and development of the Church's understanding of Mary. This is understandable, given the Council Fathers desire to renew Catholic teaching on Mary by restating that teaching through the ancient title of Mary as type of the Church. In so doing, Mary is placed in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Robust foundations were thus provided for ecumenical collaboration on theological consideration of Mary. The Council's text on Mary created the shared space from which the theological truth of Mary can be thoroughly explored by Christian brothers and sisters. Reflection on the undeveloped potential of the Council's text on Mary should commence with reading *Lumen Gentium* in light of the chapter on Mary, and the chapter on Mary in light of the whole of *Lumen Gentium*. In doing so, Theresa Marie Chau Nguyen argues, the trinitarian or "perichoretic relationship of Mary and the Church and of the essence of the Church's mission and motherhood" would become more apparent.²⁶ It will also, as Chau Nguyen demonstrates, highlight the sacramental nature of the Church that is central to Catholic teaching.²⁷ Here we see, in *Lumen Gentium*'s description of the Church, what it is and its purpose, potential impulses away from ecumenism. In personifying

²⁵ Justin Kalan, "Into His Own': Marian Implications of Faith in John's Gospel," July 18, 2023, *Word on Fire*, <https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/into-his-own-marian-implications-of-faith-in-johns-gospel/>

²⁶ Sr. Theresa Marie Chau Nguyen, OP, "Renewed Perspectives on *Lumen Gentium*'s Marian-Ecclesiological Synthesis," *Maria New Series* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1–11, 2.

²⁷ Nguyen, "Renewed Perspectives on *Lumen Gentium*'s Marian-Ecclesiological Synthesis," 8–9.

the Church, Mary personifies the different denominational understandings of the Church. If ecumenical dialogue on Mary initiates its reading of the chapter on Mary in light of chapter 1, on the body of Christ, and chapter 2, on the people of God, the Catholic understanding of the Church as the body of Christ as the people of God may alleviate such tensions.

In renewed consideration of the Council's text on Mary, the post-Vatican II Marian statements by Paul VI and John Paul II that emphasised Mary as representative of humanity are critical. Continued discord over the Council's Marian statements necessitated Paul VI to issue a number of documents to clarify the correct veneration of Mary and her role in Christian faith. Central to those is the rejection of any type of Marian worship: *Signum Magnum* (1967) and *Marius Cultus* (1974). The continuing need to underscore the Marian ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*, in part at least, led to the Marian Year of 1988. John Paul II sought "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."²⁸ These clarifications should be read in parallel with Ratzinger's efforts in the post-conciliar period to elucidate and develop Vatican II's teaching on Mary.²⁹ To mark the Marian Year, the Congregation of Catholic Education (CCE) issued a letter on *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*, March 25, 1988. The letter refers to how Paul VI and John Paul II's teachings draw out the anthropological importance of Mary. The popes see Mary "as the supreme expression of human freedom in the cooperation of man with God."³⁰ While everything about Mary, her privileges, her mission, and her destiny is "intrinsically referable to the mystery of the Church," what is referred to Mary also refers to the human race. "For the disciples of the Lord the Virgin is a great symbol: a person who achieves the most intimate aspirations of her intellect, of her will and of her heart, being open through Christ in the Spirit to the transcendence of God in filial

²⁸ John Paul II, "Redemptoris Mater: On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church," encyclical letter, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 79 (1987): 427.

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983); Joseph Ratzinger "You Are Full of Grace: Elements of Biblical Devotion to Mary," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 16, no. 1 (1989): 54–68.

³⁰ Congregation of Catholic Education, "The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation," *Marian Studies* 39 (1988): § 15.

dedication, taking root in history through the hard-working service of others.³¹

Importantly, this reference to humanity is couched in the caution that consideration of Mary and women “is a long way from being exhausted and from yielding its finest fruits; and it awaits further developments.”³² A subsequent letter in 2004 from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “On the Collaboration between Men and Women,” in part responds to this discussion. The letter, issued when Ratzinger was prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, makes a critical contribution by underscoring the scriptural data upon which Christian anthropology is to be understood. In that regard, the letter rejects an outdated mode of femininity as passivity in relation to Mary and the Church, stating that feminine values are first and foremost human values of which the female is a sign. The Aristotelian dichotomy of masculine and feminine is thereby healed by being resituated within the human being created male and female. Each human being holds with themselves masculinity and femininity. In addition, it states that the creation accounts in no way position women as secondary. The Hebrew word for helpmate, *ezer*, is, it notes, also used in relation to God’s help to humankind.³³ Mary, type of the Church, the new Eve, is truly her son’s helper.

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Renewal of Catholic theological consideration of Mary at the Council is set within the context of the Catholic Church’s redefinition of its relationship with the world. The Second Vatican Council’s Marian renewal is rendered through a thoroughly scriptural Mary, along with the church fathers’ primary description of her as type and

³¹ *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*, § 21.

³² *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*, § 15. See my discussion of this letter in *Innovation within Tradition*, 175–78.

³³ The Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration between Men and Women in the Church and the World,” *The Holy See*, §§ 5–6 (note 5), 14, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html.

personification of the Church.³⁴ In resituating Mary, Mother of God—that is, the mother of the human nature of the person of the divine Logos—the Council re-founded the theological basis for all that is said of Mary upon the sources of Christian faith. It reflects the framework from which all Christian statements on Mary must emanate and to which they must conform. Space was thereby opened for reengagement on Mary among Christian brothers and sisters. In so doing, the Council provided the firm theological grounds to reconsider the fruitfulness of the line of thought emerging from the medieval period. The very specific Mariology initiated by Bernard of Clairvaux on the person of Mary in relation to Christ, which had become forgetful of the full breadth of meaning of the scriptural Mary as type of the Church, is reconnected. Theological consideration of Mary is given good soil to grow. A reading of Mary rooted in Scripture and the church fathers can draw in all the subsequent insights and make appropriate corrections while allowing for Christian consideration of Mary to grow and flower. It provides the opportunity to synthesize these elements into a coherent whole in which Mary, Mother of God, is held together in tension with her personification of the Church.

Mary represents humanity, so it is only when Mary and Jesus are considered in their relationship as mother and son, and those *relationships* are considered in relation to and with the Father and the Holy Spirit, that the mystery of salvation can be perceived in their mutually yeses to the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is in the Holy Spirit, mediated by Mary, type of the Church, that we encounter the Son through whom we see the Father. Mary's place and role in Christian faith and theology are determinative for Christianity as a whole and, hence, for the fullness of the Church's understanding of God, humanity, and the Church herself.³⁵ Jesus is fully divine and fully human without mixture, confusion, or separation, two natures in one person, because he received his humanity from Mary. Mary's yes, a yes given in full freedom, emerged from the faith of Israel, from the holy remnant, the

³⁴ Rene Laurentin, *Mary in Scripture, Liturgy, and the Catholic Tradition*, trans. Sean O'Brien (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014).

³⁵ The crisis that led to the acceptance of Mary as *Theotokos*, God-bearer, in 431 CE, illustrates this clearly. The issues were christological—who is Jesus Christ?—and these were reflected in the title *Theotokos*. Antonia Atanassova, “Did Cyril of Alexandria Invent Mariology?” and Richard M. Price, “The *Theotokos* and the Council of Ephesus,” in *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (London: Burns & Oates, 2008).

anawin who are the poor ones of Israel. Only in the light of Christ does Mary stand forth as *Theotokos*. Only in the light of Christ's body, the Church, does Mary as type of the Church reveal the true depths of the mystery of the Church. The temptation to address the challenges of today by considering Mary in relation to women, and its corollary to consider Jesus in relation to men, would miss the essence of the mystery of salvation. The human being's yes in response to God's address opens to them the full potential of the truly human: to transcend the limits of their human nature through their person in relatedness without reserve with God so as to participate in divinity.³⁶ What is clearly evident is that the fullness of Mary in Christian faith and theology is yet to be discovered. More precisely, it is a work in progress in which Mary, the person who personifies the Church, is to be layered into the Church's understanding of the totality of Christian faith and theology.

An appropriate starting place for ecumenical collaboration on such work is to read the key eschatological events of salvation history in relation to each other: the account of creation and fall in conjunction with Genesis's protoevangelium (Gen 3:15) in light of the annunciation, the incarnation, and the birth of Jesus in relation to Jesus's death, resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and all the preceding in light of Revelations 5, 12, and 17, along with the description of the Lord making all things new (Rev 21:1–7). The program of Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church is then not a Catholic endeavor initiated by Vatican II but a Christian one giving dynamism to ecumenical dialogue. Mary's life as depicted in Scripture is the basis for renewal of dialogue on the Church among Christian brothers and sisters. This is seen most particularly in the trinitarian act of the annunciation and incarnation. God sent his messenger to Mary: "Hail, Mary, full of grace." Mary asked for clarification, "How can that be?" Mary, having received her answer, declared her yes! As Scripture describes it, the incarnation then occurred in the following way: "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35), and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). It is these scriptural passages that *par excellence* tell us

³⁶ Mary Frances McKenna, "Ratzinger and the Truly Human," in *Oxford Handbook on Joseph Ratzinger*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy and Tracey Rowland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

who God is, who Mary is, and hence who the Church is. It is from here that ecumenical consideration can explore God's work of redemption both from the Catholic perspective on humanity's cooperation with God and from the Protestant perspective on humanity's reception of God's grace. ⊕

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