

Ecce Mater Tua

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Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary

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We welcome scholarly contributions from all topics in Mariology, including but not limited to Marian doctrine, Mary in Scripture and the writings of the Fathers, Marian piety and devotion, Mary in the liturgy, Mary in the papal magisterium. Topics in Marian mediation are especially welcome.

Quotations of the Bible should use the RSV-CE, unless the essay necessitates the use of another version. Please include five keywords with your submission (e.g., mariology, perpetual virginity, John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, Pope Pius IX). If an article or book review is accepted for publication, authors must verify that the piece conforms to style instructions. Greek and Hebrew do not need to be transliterated, but may be submitted in Unicode format, and the author should attend to making sure that words are spelled correctly with correct diacritical marks.

Book Reviews:

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Commentario

Pope Francis and the Coredemptive Role of Mary, the “Woman of Salvation”: What Does It Mean to Say the Mother of God is Co-Redemptrix?¹

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The homily of Pope Francis for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12, 2019 has generated renewed interest and controversy over the Marian title of Co-redemptrix. The Holy Father's homily was given in Spanish in a spontaneous *ex tempore* manner. In the homily, he made one reference to the title of co-redemptrix: “Faithful to her Master, who is her Son, the unique Redeemer, she never wanted to take anything away from her Son. She never introduced herself as ‘co-redemptrix.’ No. “disciple” (*Fiel a su Maestro, que es su Hijo, el único Redentor, jamás quiso para sí tomar algo de su Hijo. Jamás se presentó como co-redentora. No, discípula.*).

Pope Francis is completely accurate in stating that Mary never “introduced herself” as “co-redemptrix,” neither in the context of the Annunciation nor in the historical events at Guadalupe, the subject of his homily. This, though, does not in itself deny the doctrinal legitimacy of the co-redemptrix title when it is used with its proper meaning in referring to the unique participation of Mary in the historical Redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, the only divine Redeemer.

The Holy Father is likewise entirely accurate when he states that “she never wanted to take away anything from her Son.” Fortunately, when Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Pius XI before him repeatedly used the title, “co-redemptrix” for Our Lady, they did not seek to take anything from Jesus and give it to Mary, but rather to identify Mary's unique cooperation in the redemptive work accomplished by Christ.

¹ This essay was originally published on Jan. 8, 2020, in *La Stampa: Vatican Insider* and is reprinted here with the permission of the publisher.

The co-redemptrix title seeks to represent, in one term, the Church's official doctrine of Mary's unrivaled participation in the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, the sole Divine Redeemer. The official and undeniable Marian doctrine of the Church is repeatedly taught at the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen gentium*, 56, 57, 58, 61) and by the papal magisterium of the last three centuries.

The Doctrine of Marian Coredemption

The doctrine of Marian coredemption teaches that the Blessed Virgin, by the will of God, cooperated in a unique and singular manner in the work of redemption with and under her divine Son. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, God, in his omnipotence, could have redeemed the human race in many ways, but He chose to become man by being conceived and born of a woman. He saw this as the most fitting or appropriate means for redeeming the human race.² Because God chose to redeem the human race by becoming man, He needed a Mother in order to assume a human nature and become like us in all things but sin (cf. Heb 4:15). The Church teaches that "God ineffable ... from the beginning and before the ages, chose and ordained a mother for his only begotten Son, from whom he would become incarnate and be born in the blessed fullness of time."³ The Blessed Virgin Mary, therefore, was "predestined from eternity by that decree of divine providence which determined the incarnation of the Word to be the Mother of God."⁴ The Blessed Virgin was in this way "above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord."⁵

The early Christian Church faithfully handed on Mary's unique role in Redemption contained in Scripture and Apostolic Tradition. The post-apostolic Church of the second century conveyed Mary's coredemptive role within the primitive model of the "New Eve" revealed in Gen 3:15. Just as Eve had participated with Adam in the loss of grace for the human family (Gen 3:1–7) so Mary, the New Eve, participated with Christ, the New Adam in the restoration of grace for the human family. Vatican II, in *Lumen gentium*, 56, makes reference to this analogy by citing St. Irenaeus, who identifies Mary as the "cause of salvation for

² *Summa theologiae* [ST] III q. 1 a. 2.

³ Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Dec. 8, 1854; D-H, 2800.

⁴ *Lumen gentium* [LG] 61.

⁵ *Ibid.*

herself and the whole human race.”⁶ St. Jerome (c. 347–420) also sums up the teaching succinctly by saying, “Death through Eve, life through Mary.”

The medieval Church highlights Our Lady’s role in the redemption. St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) speaks of Mary’s compassion with Jesus at Calvary, and her “offering of her Son” for our redemption;⁷ while his disciple, Arnold of Chartres (d. 1160) refers to Mary’s “co-suffering” and “co-dying” with her Son at Calvary.⁸

The Church also teaches that Mary at the foot of the cross, suffering in a profound way with her only-begotten Son, “associated herself with a mother’s heart with Christ’s sacrifice,” and lovingly consented “to the immolation of this victim which she herself had brought forth.”⁹ Thus, although Christ is the one Savior of the human race, Mary, by God’s will, associated herself with his sacrificial offering in a unique and singular way.

The recognition of Mary’s maternal union with Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross developed during the Middle Ages and gradually came to be taught by the Church’s magisterium. St. Pius X, in his 1904 encyclical, *Ad diem illum*, taught that, because of Mary’s singular association with Christ in “the work of human salvation” (*humanae salutis opus*), “she merits for us *de congruo* ... what Christ merits for us *de condigno*.”¹⁰ Pius X’s successor, Benedict XV, in his 1918 letter, *Inter sodalicia*, wrote that Mary, renounced her maternal rights and, “as far as it depended on her, offered her Son to placate divine justice; so we may well say that she, with Christ, redeemed mankind.”¹¹ In his 1984 apostolic letter, *Salvifici doloris*, John Paul II says that “it was on Calvary that Mary’s suffering, beside the suffering of Jesus, reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view, but which was mysterious and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of the world.”¹²

These popes do not mean that Christ, as the divine Savior, needed Mary’s offering in any absolute sense. They do, however, believe that

⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*, III.22.4.

⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo 3 de purificatione*.

⁸ Arnold of Chartres, *De Laud. BVM*.

⁹ *LG*, 58.

¹⁰ Pius X, *Ad diem illum*, D-H, 3370.

¹¹ Benedict XV, *Inter sodalicia*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [AAS] 10 (1919), 182.

¹² John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, 25.

God freely chose to associate Mary in the work of redemption in a way that transcends the cooperation of the rest of the faithful.¹³ In his 1954 encyclical, *Ad caeli Reginam*, Pius XII teaches that Mary assisted in our redemption “by giving of her own substance, by freely offering him for us, by her singular desire and petition for, and active interest in our salvation.”¹⁴ Pius XII goes on to describe Mary as “a partner in the redemption of the human race (*redimendi generis humani consors*).”¹⁵

Our Lady’s cooperative role with Jesus in the work of redemption is theologically based on the central Catholic principle of “participation” where we, as disciples of Jesus, truly share in his divine life of grace, but without adding or subtracting anything from Jesus himself. Our Lady’s role as co-redemptrix is the perfect human model for all Christians to follow by participating in Jesus’ great work of redemption. This is done when we properly respond to the words of St. Paul to “make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church (Colossians 1:24),” or as Pope St. John Paul II instructs us, to be “co-redeemers in Christ.”¹⁶

Pope Francis and Marian Coredemption

There is nothing in Pope Francis’s homily of December 12 that rejects Marian coredemption. From prior statements of his, it’s clear that he affirms this doctrine. In his morning meditation for the Solemnity of the Annunciation in 2016, Pope Francis states: “Today is the celebration of the ‘yes’... Indeed, in Mary’s ‘yes’ there is the ‘yes’ of all of salvation history and there begins the ultimate ‘yes’ of man and of God: there God re-creates, as at the beginning, with a ‘yes’, God made the earth and man, that beautiful creation: with this ‘yes’ I come to do your will and more wonderfully he re-creates the world, he re-creates us all”. Pope Francis recognizes Mary’s “yes” as an expression of her active role in salvation history—a role that we can call coredemptive. During his January 26, 2019 vigil with young people in Panama, the Holy Father spoke of Mary as “the most influential woman in history.” He also referred to the Blessed Virgin as the “influencer of God.” Mary influenced God by saying yes to his invitation and by trusting in his promises.

¹³ Cf. Col 1:24, 2 Cor 4:9–12, and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2008.

¹⁴ Pius XII, *Ad caeli Reginam*, D-H, 3914.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3915.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Discourse to the personnel of the Fatebenefratelli Hospital*, April 5, 1981.

Pope Francis also affirms Mary's union with the salvific mission of Christ up to his death on Cross and in the life of the Church. In his general audience of October 23, 2013, he notes that every action of the Blessed Virgin "was carried out in perfect union with Jesus. This union finds its culmination on Calvary: here Mary is united to the Son in the martyrdom of her heart and in the offering of his life to the Father for the salvation of humanity. Our Lady shared in the pain of the Son and accepted with him the will of the Father, in that obedience that bears fruit, that grants the true victory over evil and death." The Holy Father also points out that "Mary's 'yes', already perfect from the start, grew until the hour of the Cross. There her motherhood opened to embrace every one of us, our lives, so as to guide us to her Son." Here we see Pope Francis affirming not only Mary's fruitful participation in Christ's suffering and sacrifice on the Cross but also her universal spiritual motherhood that embraces every one of us.

Other statements of Pope Francis show that he recognizes Mary's central role in salvation history. In his November 21, 2013 address to some Camaldolese Benedictine Nuns he exclaims: "We owe so much to this Mother! She is present at every moment in the history of salvation, and in her we see a firm witness to hope. She, the mother of hope, sustains us in times of darkness, difficulty, discouragement, of seeming defeat or true human defeat." In an impromptu address given to the Servants of Mary on October 25, 2019, Pope Francis affirms Mary's central role in the work of redemption. He tells the Servants of Mary that their founders "left everything to become servants, servants of Our Lady, because they understood the role of Our Lady in redemption, a role that so often the so-called 'modern' theologies forget. But Our Lady brought us Jesus! And your Founders understood this, they understood and they became servants."

Pope Francis likewise affirms Mary's role in the mediation of grace. In his prayer of December 8, 2017, he refers to the Blessed Virgin as "Mother of grace and mercy" whose "open hands ... let the Lord's grace come down to the earth." He has also referred to Mary as "auxiliatrix" and as the "Queen of the Saints and the Gate of Heaven."

All of these references—which can be multiplied— show that Pope Francis accepts and affirms Catholic teaching on Marian coredemption and the mediation of grace. He clearly sees Mary's "yes" as a central moment in salvation history and he recognizes her union with Christ's

sacrifice on the Cross as spiritually fruitful. In his August 13, 2019 letter to the people of Genoa on the first anniversary of the terrible collapse of the Morandi Bridge he points them to Mary under the Cross suffering with her Son: “But I would also like to tell you that Jesus on the Cross was not alone. Under that scaffold, there was his mother, Maria. *Stabat Mater*, Mary was under the Cross, to share the suffering of the Son. We are not alone; we have a Mother who from Heaven looks at us with love and is close to us. Let us cling to her and say to her: ‘Mother!’ as a child does when he is afraid and wants to be comforted and reassured.”

The Title Co-redemptrix

During the Middle Ages Mary began to be referred to as the “redemptrix.” In the 10th century, a French hymnal included these words addressed to Mary: “Holy redemptrix of the world pray for us.” The term “redemptrix” was understood in subordination to Christ, the Redeemer just as mediatrix was understood in subordination to Christ, the one mediator (cf. 1 Tim 2:5). St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) spoke of Mary as “the redemptrix of the human race” because the Blessed Virgin provided flesh to the Word of God who redeemed us with his passion while she shared in his passion with her “sorrow of body and mind.”¹⁷ During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, the prefix “co” from the Latin *cum* (with) was added to make it clear that Mary’s role in redemption was with and under Christ, the Redeemer. The Jesuit, Alfonso Salmeron (1515–1585), for example, believed that Jesus—although he had no need of his mother’s help—nevertheless wanted her to share in his work of redemption as the “Co-redemptrix.”¹⁸

From the mid-1700s to the mid-1900s, the Catholic Magisterium began to provide increasing support for Marian coredemption and her mediation of grace. During the pontificate of Pius X (1903–1914) the Marian title, co-redemptrix, received official magisterial approval. In 1908 the Sacred Congregation for Rites referred to Mary as “the merciful Co-redemptrix of the human race.”¹⁹ In 1913, the Holy Office approved a prayer invoking Mary as “our Co-redemptrix.”²⁰ In 1914 the same Holy Office gave approval to a prayer appealing to Mary as “the Co-redemptrix

¹⁷ Catherine of Siena, *Oratio* XI.

¹⁸ Alfonso Salmeron, *Commentarii*, vol. 10, tr. 41.

¹⁹ *Acta Sanctae Sedis* [ASS] 41 (1908), 409.

²⁰ AAS 5 [1913], 364.

of the human race.”²¹ Pope Pius XI publicly referred to Mary as co-redemptrix on three separate occasions and John Paul II used the title at least six times. For example, in his General Audience of December 10, 1980, he invited the sick to transform their pain into a “loving offering in imitation of the Virgin Mary, the Co-redemptrix.” Other references to Mary as “co-redemptrix” by Pius XI and John Paul II can be found here.

Although Pius XI and John Paul II referred to Mary as “co-redemptrix” in public settings, other recent popes have not. Pope Pius XII, as Cardinal Pacelli, referred to Mary as “co-redemptrix” during a Holy Hour at Lourdes in 1935, but he never used the title publicly during his pontificate. There is a difference, though, between not using the title and rejecting the title. The co-redemptrix title for Our Lady has been part of the Church’s tradition since the 14th century, and has been used correctly to identify Our Lady’s unequalled cooperation in the redemption by popes, saints, mystics, bishops, clergy, theologians, and the faithful people of God, including recent saints such as St. Pio of Pietrelcina, St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, St. Josemaría Escrivá, St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. John Henry Newman, and Pope St. John Paul II. The great Fatima seer, Sister Lúcia, uses and sublimely explains the co-redemptrix title for Mary on seven occasions in her final writing, *Calls from the Message of Fatima*.

There have also been approved religious communities that are dedicated to Mary as co-redemptrix. Mention can be made of the Congregazione Figlie Maria SS. Corredentrice, founded in Catania, Italy in 1953 and approved in 1964; the Pia Associazione di Maria SS. Corredentrice, approved by the Archbishop of Reggio Calabria, Italy in 1984; the Hijas de Maria Immaculada y Corredentora (Lima, Peru), founded in 1978 and approved in 1980; the Instituto de Misioneras de Maria Corredentora (Ecuador), founded in 1964 and approved in 1969; and the Asociación de Fieles al Servicio de María Corredentora y Reina de la Paz (Venezuela), which was founded and approved in 1992 by the Archbishop of Barquisimeto, Venezuela. It should also be noted that the seminary of the Society of St. Pius X [SSPX] located in Moreno, Buenos Aires, Argentina is named Seminario Nuestra Señora Corredentora (Seminary of Our Lady Co-redemptrix). As is known, Pope Francis always maintained a cordial relationship with the Society of St. Pius X in

²¹ AAS 6 [1914], 108.

his native Argentina, and he is committed to integrating the Society officially into the life of the Catholic Church. To my knowledge, he has never objected to the name of this SSPX seminary.

Some people reject the title “co-redemptrix” because they believe it suggests equality between Jesus and Mary in the work of redemption. Nothing, though, could be further from the truth. Jesus is never spoken of as the “Co-redeemer” with Mary, but only as “the Redeemer.” The prefix “co” comes the Latin, “cum” (with) and, in this context, it does not suggest equivalence. Parents are called “co-creators” with God, but their cooperation in bringing forth new life does not make them “creators” equal to God. In a similar way, St. Paul says that we are God’s “co-workers” in 1 Cor 3:9, but this does not mean that our work is in anyway equivalent to that of God.

Some people believe Pope Francis rejected the Marian title co-redemptrix as foolishness in his December 12, 2019 homily. This, though, was not the case. In the text of the homily, the reference to foolishness comes six paragraphs after the reference to “co-redemptrix.” The Holy Father says: “When they come to us with stories about having to declare this, or make this or that other dogma, let’s not get lost in foolishness. Mary is woman, she is Our Lady, Mary is the Mother of her Son and of the Holy Mother hierarchical Church...” (*Quando nos vengán con historias de que había que declararla esto, o hacer este otro dogma o esto, no nos perdamos en tonteras: María es mujer, es Nuestra Señora, María es Madre de su Hijo y de la Santa Madre Iglesia jerárquica...*). Pope Francis wishes to warn us not to lose ourselves in foolishness by being so concerned with new Marian dogmas that we forget what is essential about Mary as woman, mother, and Mother of the Church. Pope Francis wants to highlight Mary as our Mother and the Mother of the Church. This is manifested by a book entitled *She is My Mother: Pope Francis Encounters Mary*, based on some interviews of the Holy Father by Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello, now secretary of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life.

Although the Holy Father currently holds a certain position on new Marian dogmas, there is nothing to prevent a further development in his attitude. This was clearly the case regarding his position on the Medjugorje apparitions. From his earlier somewhat negative attitude, Pope Francis has recently decided to grant unprecedented permission

for official pilgrimages to Medjugorje, even before final word on the apparitions' authenticity has been determined.

The Marian Devotion of Pope Francis

In his December 12 homily, Pope Francis affirms the legitimacy of the title, "mother of all," which has been proposed over the last century (starting in 1915) as the overall title and doctrine for a potential Marian definition, as presently none of the existing four dogmas (Mother of God, Perpetual Virginity, Immaculate Conception, Assumption) refer to Mary's direct and maternal relationship with humanity as our Spiritual Mother.

The authentic Marian character of Pope Francis's pontificate is evident, for example: in his approval of the obligatory memorial of Mary, "Mother of the Church," with its profound pneumatological significance on the Monday after Pentecost; his spreading of the powerful devotion of Our Lady, Undoer of Knots globally; his elevation of the liturgical celebration of Our Lady of Loreto to the universal calendar; his repeated teaching on the importance of the Rosary; his Marian devotional witness by beginning and ending every international journey by bringing flowers and praying before Our Lady's renowned *Salus Populi Romani* icon at St. Mary Major in Rome; his fervent devotion and pilgrimage to Our Lady of Fatima; his repeated (and potentially ecumenically threatening) motto that "A Christian without Mary is an orphan"; his recent repeated references to Our Lady as the "Mother of All Peoples,"²² which is the overall Marian doctrine requested to be solemnly defined as dogma.

The heart of Pope Francis is open to the Mother. This is why groups like Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici will continue to pray and petition for the solemn definition of Our Lady's Spiritual Motherhood, inclusive of her three motherly functions as Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix of all graces and Advocate, but always in complete obedience, fidelity and respect for the present Roman Pontiff, who is the supreme Vicar of Christ on earth.

In his recent homily for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, Pope Francis explains how the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin is also linked to her role as "the woman of salvation." He notes that on "the first day of the year, we celebrate this nuptial union between God and mankind, inaugurated in the womb of a woman. In God, there will forever be our humanity and Mary will forever be the Mother of God. She is both woman and mother: this is what is essential. From her, a woman, salvation came

²² Oct. 20, 2019; Dec. 8, 2019.

forth and thus there is no salvation without a woman. In her, God was united to us, and if we want to unite ourselves to him, we must take the same path: through Mary, woman and mother.”

In his homily for the vespers for the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, the Holy Father also recognizes the role of Mary under the Cross as the Sorrowful Mother (*Addolorata*) whose maternal tenderness reaches out to all people when he says: “And also the Mother of God, who under the Cross is the Sorrowful Mother, about to extend her maternity to all people. The Mother of God is the Mother of the Church and her maternal tenderness reaches all people” (*tutti gli uomini*). For Pope Francis, Mary is the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church who under the Cross was revealed as the Sorrowful Mother, the “Woman of salvation” (*Donna della salvezza*), the Lady of all peoples.

Pope Francis, the Humility of Mary, and the role of “Co-Redemptrix”²³

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As is well known, Pope Francis has a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. One of the qualities of Mary that he repeatedly emphasizes is her humility. In his homily on Friday, April 3, 2020, the Holy Father spoke about Our Lady of Sorrows, and he noted the importance of meditating on the seven sorrows of Mary. In a special way, he pointed to Our Lady’s humility: “The Madonna never asked anything for herself, never. Yes, for others: we think of Cana when she goes to speak to Jesus. She never said: “I am the Mother, look at me: I will be the Queen Mother.” She never said it. She doesn’t ask something of importance for herself in the apostolic college. She only accepts being Mother. She accompanied Jesus as a disciple because the Gospel shows that she followed Jesus: with friends, with pious women, she followed Jesus, she listened to Jesus.”

These words of Pope Francis harmonized providentially with the reflections of the Preacher of the Papal Household, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., who in his fourth and final Lenten Sermon—given also on April 3—applied the words of St. Paul in Phil 1:5–11 to the Virgin Mary:

Mary, though she was the Mother of God, did not count her privilege as something to hold on to, but emptied herself, calling herself a servant, and living in the likeness of all other women. She humbled herself and stayed hidden, obedient to God, till the death of her Son, and a death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted her and bestowed on her the name, which, after Jesus, is above every name, that at the name of Mary every head should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Mary is the Mother of the Lord to the glory of God the Father. Amen!

²³ This essay was originally published on April 19, 2020, in *La Stampa: Vatican Insider* and is reprinted here with the permission of the publisher.

The humility of Mary is rooted in Scripture. In Mary's great prayer, the Magnificat, she recognizes that everything she possesses is a gift from God: "the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." In *Canto* 33 of the *Paradiso*, Dante speaks of Mary as "humble and more exalted than any creature." The humble status of the Blessed Virgin as a creature is testified to by St. Louis de Montfort (1673–1716) who confesses "that Mary, being a mere creature fashioned by the hands of God is, compared to his infinite majesty, less than an atom, or rather is simply nothing since He alone can say: 'I am who am.'"²⁴

In his April 3 homily, Pope Francis also points out that that Mary never sought titles for herself. The most important title for the Blessed Virgin is "Mother," which she received from Jesus himself: "To honor the Madonna is to say: "This is my Mother" because she is the Mother. And this is the title she received from Jesus, precisely there, in the moment of the Cross (cf. Jn 19:26–27). To your children you are Mother. He didn't make her Prime Minister or give her titles of "functionality." Only "Mother." And then the Acts of the Apostles show us her in prayer with the Apostles as Mother."

For Pope Francis, Mary, above all else, is "Mother." She is the Mother of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and the spiritual Mother of all the faithful. The Holy Father goes on to say that Mary never wished to take any title from her Son, who is the one Redeemer:

The Madonna did not wish to take any title from Jesus; she received the gift of being his Mother and the duty to accompany us as Mother, to be our Mother. She did not ask for herself to be a quasi-redemptrix or a co-redemptrix: no. The Redeemer is only one and this title does not duplicate itself. She is only disciple and Mother. And thus, as Mother we must think of her, we must seek her, we must pray to her. She is the Mother; in the Mother Church. In the maternity of the Madonna we see the maternity of the Church who receives all, the good and the bad: all.

Pope Francis is absolutely correct. The Blessed Mother never asked to be a quasi-redemptrix or a co-redemptrix. He's also correct that in the strict, univocal sense the title Redeemer cannot be duplicated. Jesus is

²⁴ St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 14.

the divine Redeemer, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). In an analogical sense, however, human beings can participate in the work of redemption by uniting their sufferings to that of Christ. This is why Pope Benedict XVI in speaking to the sick at Fatima on May 13, 2010 invited them to be “redeemers in the Redeemer.”

Jesus is the one Redeemer and also the one Mediator between God and the human race (1 Tim 2:5). Vatican II, however, teaches that “the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation, which is but a sharing in this one source.”²⁵ The title co-redemptrix when applied to Mary must never take anything away from Jesus the one divine Redeemer of the human race. Jesus is the God-man, and Mary is a human creature. Mary’s role in the work of redemption must always be understood as secondary, subordinate, and totally dependent on her divine Son. As St. Louis de Montfort explains, God “never had and does not now have any absolute need of the Blessed Virgin for the accomplishment of his will and the manifestation of his glory.”²⁶ The saving work of Jesus was all-sufficient, but God willed Mary’s collaboration in the redemption in a unique and singular way.

The title co-redemptrix, which has been used by theologians, saints, and mystics since the 15th century, must be understood as Mary’s unique collaboration with and under her divine Son, the Redeemer of the human race. The prefix, “co,” comes from the Latin *cum* (with) so the Blessed Virgin, as the co-redemptrix, collaborates in the work of redemption but only with Christ, the Redeemer, whose death on the Cross is the meritorious cause of our salvation.²⁷

Fr. Salvatore Maria Perrella, O.S.M., professor of dogmatics and Mariology at the Theological Faculty Marianum in Rome, points out that “the expression ... co-redemptrix, is not wrong in itself but taken in isolation it could convey the idea of the necessity of Mary being the associate of the Redeemer.”²⁸ Fr. Perrella is correct. As St. Louis de Montfort says, God has no absolute need of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary’s co-redemptive role, like her role as Mediatrix of grace, flows from the will of God, who willed to associate her in the work of redemption. The Blessed Virgin was “predestined from eternity to be the Mother of

²⁵ *Lumen gentium*, 62.

²⁶ *True Devotion*, 14.

²⁷ Cf. Council of Trent, D-H, 1529.

²⁸ Interview with Manuela Petrini, *In Terris*, Aug. 15, 2019.

God by that decree of divine providence which determined the Incarnation of the Word.”²⁹

Pope John Paul II believed we can all be “co-redeemers of humanity.”³⁰ Mary’s co-redemptive role, however, is altogether unique. As the Mother of the Word Incarnate, she said yes on behalf of all human nature to be the Mother of the Redeemer.³¹ She cared for the Savior as his Mother and accompanied Him all the way to Calvary, “where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of the Victim which she herself had brought forth.”³² The great Mariologist, Fr. René Laurentin (1917–2017), notes that Mary “cooperated with the unique Redemption on a supreme level and with a unique intimacy.”³³

It was not until the 20th century that the Magisterium gave official approval to the title co-redemptrix. During the pontificate of Pius X, the Holy See three times gave approval to prayers invoking Mary as co-redemptrix; *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. Pius XI was the first pope to publicly use the title: once on Nov. 30, 1933; again, on March 23, 1934; and once again on April 28, 1935. John Paul II publicly used the title Co-redemptrix at least six times: General Audience, Dec. 10, 1980; General Audience, Sept. 8, 1982; Angelus Address, Nov. 4, 1984; Discourse at World Youth Day, March 31, 1985; Address to the Sick, March 24, 1990; Discourse of Oct. 6, 1991. Moreover, in a homily in Guayaquil, Ecuador on Jan. 31, 1985, John Paul II spoke of the “co-redemptive role of Mary (*el papel corredentor de María*), which can be translated as “the role of Mary as co-redemptrix.”

These papal uses of co-redemptrix abide by the principle set forth by Pope Francis in his April 3, 2020 homily. They never take anything away from Jesus Christ, the one Redeemer and they don’t correspond to any title asked for by the Blessed Virgin herself. They do, however, recognize like Fr. Laurentin that Mary’s cooperation with the work of redemption is “on a supreme level and with a unique intimacy.” The

²⁹ *LG*, 61.

³⁰ John Paul II, Discourse, April 5, 1981.

³¹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 30, a. 1.

³² *LG*, 58.

³³ *Traité sur la Vierge Marie, édition sixième Court traité sur la Vierge Marie, sixième édition* - Paris: François-Xavier de Guibert, 2009.

Blessed Virgin cooperated with the work of redemption precisely as Mother, and she did so in perfect humility and obedience to the will of God.

Pope Francis is correct to emphasize the humility of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It's absolutely true that Mary never requested any titles or privileges for herself. She never asked to be called the Mother of God or the Queen of Heaven, but the Church honors her with these titles in her teaching and in her prayers. Such titles are found in the Litany of Loreto, which is connected to the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Loreto, approved by Pope Francis in 2019 as an optional memorial for December 10 in the General Roman Calendar. The Church honors Mary with many titles out of love and devotion. These titles are also an expression of gratitude to God who humbled Himself to share our humanity by becoming incarnate of the Virgin Mary. Not only should we thank God for the gift of his Mother, but we should also thank Mary herself for saying yes and becoming the Mother of Christ, our Redeemer. In his April 3 homily, Pope Francis invites us all to pause to thank our Mother Mary:

Today we do well to pause a little and think of the suffering and the sorrows of the Madonna. She is our Mother. And how she brought herself there, how she brought good there, with strength, with weeping; it wasn't a feigned weeping; it was really a heart destroyed with sorrow. We do well to pause a little and say to the Madonna: "Thank you for accepting to be Mother when the Angel announced it to you and thank you for accepting to be Mother when Jesus spoke it to you."

The Virgin Mary is the perfect model of humility. In the words of Dante, she is "humble and exalted more than any creature." We need to thank Pope Francis for reminding us that Mary never sought any titles for herself. It is only because God chose to associate her with his work of redemption that the Blessed Virgin has been honored with many titles like Queen of Heaven and co-redemptrix. These titles, though, do not come from her but from the recognition of her unique and intimate association with God's plan of salvation. The Blessed Mother knows that she owes everything to God. This is why she exclaims: "the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

Reflections on Mary: Understanding the Immaculate Conception and Mary's example for humanity as a Co-redeemer

ANNE, A LAY APOSTLE

When discussing our human role as co-redeemers, meaning, those who *'make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ'* (Col 1:24), we recognize that our relationship with Christ does not make us God. Neither does it make us perfect, nor divine, nor members of the Trinity. We, members of the human race, are offered opportunities to cooperate with God by helping each other and interceding for each other before God.

Our unique relationship with Christ does not make us equal to Christ, rather, it makes us servants to Christ, regardless of the scope of any sanctity we might possess or any contribution we might make. Jesus Christ does not become a lesser member of the Trinity because a human person is canonized, for example. A saint may possess considerable accomplishments, achievements or a high level of holiness. Jesus Christ remains the second person of the Trinity, distinct from each saint, but also working with and through each saint.

Our Lady is similar to the saints who possessed considerable accomplishments, achievements and a high level of holiness. Her unique relationship with God resulted in the birth of Christ. But Mary's relationship with her son does not reduce Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity. Neither does it elevate Mary to something like the fourth person of the Trinity. Jesus remains divine. Mary remains human. Jesus was fully human and fully divine. We must keep Jesus where he belongs, equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

So what or who does that make Mary?

Perhaps we can distinguish Mary from Jesus in our examination of who Mary was on earth and what she did. Perhaps we can advance a conversation about Mary's role in the Church by placing her firmly in the midst of that group of people, the saints, called to contribute with God in an extraordinary fashion.

The only observation that must be made in doing this is that Mary contributed in an extraordinary way that was unique among us as human

beings and Mary was created immaculate by God so that she would be equipped to accept the task that was hers. But that was more about Jesus Christ than Mary. Mary was created immaculate, not because she was God. She was created immaculate because Jesus Christ was and is God. She worshipped God and her relationship with the Father pre-dated her relationship with Jesus. She was created immaculate, she might say, not for her sake but because her Immaculate Conception ensured an immaculate space for the human development of Jesus Christ.

We accept that Mary was a member of the human race, despite the enormous promise that accompanied her Immaculate Conception, wherein she was created without original sin. The protection of Mary from original sin created conditions that were in keeping, not with some pre-existing sanctity, but with God's divinity and the plan he had for her collaboration with him in her life. Mary remained faithful to God, not only because of what God gave to her in the gift of being created immaculate. Mary remained faithful to God through ongoing choice and that is what ensured her place as the Queen of Saints, providing a fearless and powerful example of a woman moving into the depth and breadth of sanctity.

Mary was given the gift of free will. She used it repeatedly to choose God's highest plan for her and for her family. She used her free will to draw sinners back into a harmonious and loving relationship with God. She used her free will to forgive those who hurt her or her husband or son. Mary's humanity ensured that she was wounded, even traumatized by the pain endured by her son. Her relationship with the Father, though, as a daughter and servant, equipped her with supernatural graces required for strength to constantly subordinate herself to the needs of others, as in her service to Elizabeth in the Visitation (Lk 1:39-56).

How did Mary participate in the passion of Christ? She showed up for Jesus and remained in place. Mary showed up and stayed. Was she crucified with him? Not physically. Two convicted thieves were crucified at the same time as Jesus. What Mary did was again, unique. She witnessed the anguish, suffering separate, personal anguish herself. The consummate witness to the anguish, Mary experienced her Son's crucifixion as a human mother and as a child of the Father who loves (John 19:25-27). In a very real sense, Mary experienced her own form of the crucifixion in her maternal heart.

Hatred is an affront to God. Hatred is the opposite of love and presents the highest dissonance with God. Some of the people who crucified

Christ possibly did not hate him. They may not have known him well enough to hate him personally. They certainly did not accept his authority. Some of them hated the truth about themselves which the presence of Christ mirrored. Their actual rebellion, thus, was against the Father, whom they purported to serve, but in actual fact did not serve. They did not know the Father and they banked on the fact that most people were not confident enough about their own relationship with God to challenge them successfully. This enabled them to claim an identity that gave them material and human payoffs or that assuaged their thirst for power.

A thirst for power combined with a weak identity is a difficult state of affairs for a human being to manage. It is a pitiful state. Perhaps this is part of the reason why Mary was able to forgive the Pharisees and why each of us can understand how they behaved and search for those symptoms which periodically emerge in ourselves.

But we seek to better understand Mary, the Queen of all Saints and the mother of Jesus. Mary possessed a sublime, never repeated relationship with the Father. There would be no turning away from the plan she shared with God, a plan so important that she was created immaculate for it. The plan Mary shared with the Father was so intimate that she received it into her beautiful little body. In a true sense, Mary's body contained God's hope for all of mankind. She would have seen the power and force of his decisions played out in her life. A good mother allows separation from her children and Mary allowed that separation when she accepted her Son's Passion and gave way to it as a divine plan. We recall that this is not the first time she had to contend with what appeared to be a situation impossible to overcome. Perhaps it was the second time Mary had to negotiate an event of such magnitude and mystery.

Jesus is, again, human but also divine. Mary is separate to the Trinity, even while she is a servant to the Trinity. Perhaps we can think of Mary as the servant to the Trinity, the actual handmaid of the Lord, as she stated in her own words (Lk 1:46-55).

What is it then? We all know there has never been and will never be anyone like Mary ever created. We know she is our heavenly mother. We know she was created differently, without the stain of original sin transmitted down the line by the sin of Adam in the garden. Mary stands out from us, just as she stands out to God, as evidenced in so many ways, including her Assumption into Heaven.

Jesus Christ walked the earth both humanly and divinely. Mary walked the earth humanly. She negotiated the redemption of mankind humanly. But she also received and negotiated a great deal of supernatural intervention in her humanity. We must understand that a small amount of supernatural intervention, in what we believe is possible and normal, is difficult to conceive of and to live with. At the very least, one's love for God, when one recognizes God through supernatural and direct actions, could mean that remaining time on earth feels tedious and lonely. One exists in the midst of painful limitation which can only be recognized as limitation when one understands the lack of limitation in the next world. One would gain great detachment, though, when exposed to God's power, meaning that suffering is mysteriously part of God's plan, therefore we accept it without understanding it fully.

It is worth contemplating the degree of Mary's wisdom and understanding, given the extent of the supernatural interventions in her life. One could surmise that for Mary, detachment, wisdom, watchfulness... these things were keenly developed and present in a way that makes studying her vitally important for understanding ourselves as God's children. So, while we accept Mary as Mother of God and as a member of the human race, we also elevate her amongst ourselves as the greatest member of the human race, after Jesus Christ. We do this precisely because she was human, and like us, a creation of the Trinity rather than a member of the Trinity.

Why is this so crucial?

It is crucial because in order to understand how Mary intercedes for us so effectively and confidently, we must grasp her position as the person who lived closest to the Trinity, while remaining a human being on earth.

On earth we sometimes say that one must wrap one's head around a concept, meaning, one must learn to accept something that is either unknown or un- encountered. Mary would not have had to do that with the concept of God. She simply remained subordinated to God and thus always adapted herself most fully into the will of the Father.

Indeed, we might say that nobody served with more consistency than Mary. She seeks to help us become more like God in love. Mary is the best formation director, the highest shaper of Christian thinking and thought, after the founder of Christianity, himself, Jesus Christ. While she would remain intimately connected to her reality as a created being of God, we can look to her as the highest example of servant to God.

Mary loves us most like God loves us because she loves God so fully and completely. As stated, God assumed Mary into himself at the Assumption, rather than let the first tabernacle decay. That alone should prompt us to study Mary as the highest example to follow, after Christ, rather than as a person to adore.

With regard to the Assumption of Mary into Heaven, body and soul, why might God do this?

God's action of assuming Mary into Heaven, rather than allowing her body to decay, is logical. There was nothing in her body to prevent instant harmony with the next life, nothing that had to die off. She was thus brought into eternity at the end of her life. From that eternal position, Mary fulfils her greatest joy in mothering us and offering to us the highest example of how to serve on earth. She cooperated with God in creating, she cooperated with God in detaching from that which he created in her and through her, and she remained faithful to the end of the mysterious plan for God's redemption of mankind.³⁴ Thus she cooperated with God in the redemption of mankind, much like John the apostle and Mary Magdalene, amongst other women, but in a more distinct fashion because she lacked original sin. She knew God in a way the others did not. Mary recognized God. She participated more fully than any other human being.

In further consideration, can we say that the fidelity of John and the women at the cross was important? Did they cooperate with Jesus in the plan for redemption by their faithfulness to him and to his mother? Did they co-redeem each time they suffered for the Gospel message? The answer must be yes to these questions and we accept that the answer is yes.

Then should we not identify Mary as the person who did this to the highest degree? She certainly did not participate in a lesser way than the others present that day. Jesus Christ is the only divine Redeemer. We

³⁴ Mary's co-creating with the Father refers to her cooperation in creating the Incarnate Word since Our Lord's human nature comes from her. All human parents are co-creators with God, but Mary is the co-creator with the Father in a special way because of her cooperation in conceiving and giving birth to the Incarnate Word who was predestined "from eternity" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 61 and Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Denz.-H., 2800).

agree that Jesus Christ redeemed humanity through his death on the cross. Mary remained present with him and participated in that action. But perhaps if we are known as co-redeemers and co-redemptrices, or simply in the collective term co-redeemers, '*making up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ*' (Col 1: 24), then Mary should be known as the Co-Redeemer or the Co-Redemptrix, because of her unique participation, given who she is and was in God.

Possibly the problem with the title is as simple as time. The Latin suffix of trix is not used as commonly now as in times past. This leads to a misunderstanding that the feminine trix somehow indicates equality when in fact it simply refers to gender. A woman who participates in the redemption poses no threat to the divinity of Christ. Further, if we celebrate Mary as co-creating with the Father, can we fail to celebrate her as co-redeeming with the Son?

To be clear, we contribute our afflictions and sufferings to the overall effort of the Church, the Body of Christ, hoping that through our offering God will choose to send graces to others. In a sense, God redeems our offered sufferings through benefits and graces for those around us. The death of Christ on the cross was sufficient to redeem mankind. Nothing further can be needed. Yet, we, his followers, do well to offer our hardships in a spirit of intercession for the effort of the Gospel message. In a sense, we offer our afflictions as a service. Jesus Christ offered the one unique total sacrifice. Our contribution indicates our discipleship, as opposed to Christ's divine Kingship. Our contribution recognizes our unity with his body, the Church. Perhaps, too, we may think of 'what is lacking' as a reference to time, as in, what is both possible and needed now, today, through the cooperation of us who follow, wherever we find ourselves.

As human beings, we elevate Mary, not to the level of the divine, but to the level of the highest action of co-redeeming that is possible for humanity. This does two things. It places Mary in a proper, truthful perspective and also recognizes a feminine highest contribution, something that is real and something we urgently need as a faith community.

Mary's relationship with the Father was sublime. She was human mother to his Son and also servant to the Lord's every need and to God's plan. Additionally, Mary could be considered the first and best disciple of Jesus Christ. The comparisons of Mary to her son can be a bit like the role of discussions about women in the Church. They can be safely consigned

to a negative outcome as long as the initial premise remains faulty, for example, that Mary was somehow part of the Trinity or that women should be ordained to the priesthood. Those are the distractions and those block urgently needed progress. We must resolve these issues.

With regard to Mary, we continue to ponder. Is it fair to state that Mary is the highest example of a human being co-creating with God? It must be so. Given this, would it also be logical that Mary is the highest example of a human being co-redeeming with God?

The Immaculate Conception of Mary, that is, her creation without original sin, meant that she could be happy and unencumbered by anything that would make carrying the perfect one within her body difficult. If Mary had not been created immaculate, she would have been distracted by the contrast of that which was developing within and the reality and periodic dissonance of her own humanity. She could have 'crumpled' with the burden of her sinfulness compared to God's perfection resting inside her body.

As it stood, given the Immaculate Conception, the second person of the Trinity developing within her resonated divinely and Mary remained untroubled by this resonance. The resonance of God could simply pass through her because she, too, resonated with God.

The Immaculate Conception ensured that she was able to receive the pregnancy while remaining undisturbed by the presence of God within her being and body. If Mary was not prepared as a space, any woman, regardless of her relationship with God, would have experienced the pregnancy to some degree as a trauma, or at least she would be unable to hold ongoing peace with the supernatural reality. But any distress was unnecessary. God, himself was acting in the development of Jesus. Mary simply pondered the words and her condition in her heart (Lk 2:19).

Mary's innocence, combined with wisdom, possibly prepared Mary to play her part as the human mother of Jesus. Mary's early experience as a mother would also have prepared her to be the spiritual mother to all of God's children. How would Mary, a woman created without original sin, have dealt with injustice, we might wonder. Would she have contemplated it in her heart and recognized that any suffering inflicted on her family was also inflicted on others, as well? Would she have rejoiced that she could become familiar with it in her heart, given that she, in her maternity, sought to understand people fully and wholly as children of God?

There would have been other sufferings for Mary, given her relationship with the Father. The sufferings of others and the inconsistency of actions against God would have been difficult for her to bear in her life. Mary's actions demonstrated enormous virtue. She possessed virtue, advanced into it and continued to acquire it. People assume that Mary's greatest pain took place in the Crucifixion. It would be difficult to imagine any worse suffering. But we cannot discount that the separation from Joseph and Jesus Christ after the Resurrection also brought enormous human loneliness for her, despite her commitment to the early Church.

One can be busy and still lonely, as many know.

Any true contemplation of Mary must conclude that for all of her humanity, Mary was not an ordinary person, but an extraordinary person, the most extraordinary person. With Joseph and Jesus, her little family, Mary was placed by God in a loving situation, and was cherished in a way that had to provide her with a sense of fulfillment and emotional safety. She longed for final union with the Father, no doubt. That could not have changed during her lifetime given her relationship with the Creator.

Many people leap to an objection of any suggestion that Mary responded to life perfectly, or that she never sinned. We must resist the instinct which emerges from our limited human thinking to negatively scrutinize our Mother, our Queen, for evidence of flaws. Perhaps we can agree that the greatest journey for us is the one that results in the fullest understanding of our heavenly mother's virtue.

Why study Mary, the mother of God? Why clarify her contribution to God's plan, to her son, and to humanity? Is it about history, the past? Or is it more likely that our future requires this clarity? Will the study of Mary and her relationship with God reveal what is possible and desirable, (albeit differently) between God and each person? Will the study of Mary clarify the unrepeatable extent of her influence? It must be so.

But certainly, if we are all called to *'make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ'* (Col 1:24), then there should be no doubt that Mary did that best.

Essays

Our Undying Lady: The Case for Mary's Preservation from Death

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Introduction

Though little attention has been devoted to the question of the Blessed Virgin's immortality since the years immediately following the promulgation of *Munificentissimus Deus*, whether or not the Mother of God died is a live question in Catholic theology.³⁵ That there has not been a good deal of sustained reflection on this matter is somewhat puzzling, for it seems to have been a most pressing question to arise on the heels of *Munificentissimus Deus*, primarily due to the fact that the language of the definition was, by most accounts, rather ambivalent.³⁶ Should the Church make any additional dogmatic statement about Mary, it is conceivable that it be on this point, even if the possibility is a remote.

³⁵ "Since 1950, there has been no significant development of doctrine on the topic. The church, therefore, has no dogmatic position on the question. Discussion of it remains within the scope of speculative theology" (Paul Griffiths, *Decreation* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014], 156). Griffiths briefly addresses this issue as part of his discussion on the nature of human flesh. Though he does not offer a thorough defense of the view that Mary never died, he seems to consider this the more reasonable opinion. This is confirmed in an essay of his that appeared around the same time, in which he brings out the inconsistencies of Newman's proclamations relating to Mary's death along with her privileges (Paul Griffiths, "Did Mary Die? Newman on Sin, Death, and Mary's Mortality," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 13.2 [2015], 379–98).

³⁶ See, for example, Bertin Farrell's treatment of the discussion and subsequent defense of the opinion that Mary did not die: "The Immortality of the Blessed Virgin," *Theological Studies* 16, no. 4 (1955): 591–606. He states, "There was more unanimity in regard to the *terminus ad quem* of the Assumption than in regard to the *terminus a quo*. The bone of contention was supplied by the words, 'expleto terrestris vitae cursu' It is generally recognized that the Bull, *Munificentissimus Deus*, has left the question, whether Mary died or not, to the free discussion of theologians. It is likewise generally recognized that the opinion of those who hold that Mary did not die is gaining adherents. For that reason, a discussion of their opinion would seem timely" (591, 593). Happily, since this was a topic of concern between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, much of the research concerning the data of tradition has already been carried out and is readily available. A 1957 volume of the periodical *Marian Studies* (vol. 8) was devoted to this theme and presents articles covering the patristic, scholastic, and liturgical witness as well as one article addressing the question in light of the Bull of 1950.

This essay, wherein I offer support for the opinion that Mary did not die, is intended merely to kindle the speculative theological dialogue which was quite aflame until the 1960s. It is, in part, a response to a recent invitation to take up one of the many “beautifully colored threads of reflection on Mary” that were left hanging after Vatican II.³⁷

Since this is not a commonly treated theological topic, it may be asked what importance is attached to the question. What difference does it make whether or not the Blessed Virgin died? One way of answering this is to appeal to the divine works of creation and redemption. Though the Creator is not responsible for the ruin caused by the free creatures’ misuse of freedom,³⁸ it can be difficult to escape the feeling that the fall of creation somehow drags down the honor of the Creator. Many have echoed the lament of the psalmist: “Remember what my being is: for have you created all the sons of men in vain? What man is there who shall live and not see death?”³⁹ Death is universal, but the Christian faith teaches that this would not have been the case if humans had remained in the state of grace in which they were created. Human persons, made in the divine image, were meant to be immortal human persons.⁴⁰ If all humans suffer death, even if it is not a permanent state, it seems that the divine intention for humanity is not perfectly actualized in any human person. But if Mary did not die, then she is the answer to the psalmist’s

³⁷ John Cavadini and Danielle Peters, eds., *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2017), 2. Whether or not this is one of the “flood of Marian speculations” Balthasar had in mind, “that ... were incapable of bearing lasting fruit,” I cannot say (Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama III: Dramatis Personae*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992], 316).

³⁸ “Do not invite death by the error of your life, or bring on destruction by the works of your hands; because God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal” (Wis 1:12–15 [NRSV]). Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent citations of Scripture are from the NRSV.

³⁹ Ps 88:47, 48 (LXX).

⁴⁰ Considered apart from God’s intentions for human persons, who are beings composed of both body and soul, many would argue that the rational soul is in itself immortal in distinction from the body which is in itself subject to disintegration. Because of the body’s natural mortality, any overcoming of this limit must be due to grace. Given the soul’s inherent immortality, the question of the immortality of the human *person* becomes more focused on the corruptibility of the body. And the prelapsarian *state* of grace, as it relates to immortality, pertains more to the body than to the soul.

question. *Not* all mere humans were created in vain; one lived and never died.⁴¹

In a similar way, Mary's immortality could be seen as perfecting the divine work of human redemption—the stroke of the brush that completes a masterpiece. Death, according to much of the tradition, is that from which humans were in greatest need of deliverance after the fall. Death is the ultimate adversary, over which Christ gained victory for us through his own death and resurrection, and it will be decisively abolished when the fruits of Christ's resurrection are applied to all humanity. But there is a nagging question behind all of this. Is death really “swallowed up in victory” if it must still be tasted by all? When, like the rain, it still falls on the just and the unjust alike? By asking this, I do not mean to cast a shadow on the divine plan of redemption. On the contrary, I mean to question whether or not we have actually grasped the depths of it. For if the Son of God took his mother into heavenly beatitude without her ever undergoing the separation of soul and body, then she would represent for all humanity the *utter* victory of life over death—a victory won by Christ and preeminently manifest in Mary.⁴² Contemplation of the end of Mary's earthly life, like all contemplation about her, is also contemplation of her Son. So, I would suggest that inasmuch as it is good to ponder the profundity of God's redeeming love in Christ, it is just as good to ponder this question of the immortality of the Mother of God.⁴³

⁴¹ Leaving aside for now the question of Enoch and Elijah, as well as Mary's participation in the death of her son, which was a kind of death for her, regardless of what happened at the end of her terrestrial life.

⁴² That in Mary we see the epitome of Christ's redeeming work was a common way of defending or understanding the dogma of the Assumption in the 1950s, even by Catholic theologians with a reputation for espousing subdued Marian views. In one of Karl Rahner's earlier works, for example, he arrives at this *Grundprinzip*: “Mary is redeemed in the most perfect way” (Peter Joseph Fritz, “Karl Rahner's Marian ‘Minimalism,’” in *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, 160; Karl Rahner, “Die Assumptio-Arbeit von 1951 mit den Ergänzungen bis 1959,” *Maria, Mutter des Herrn: Mariologische Studien, Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 9, ed. Regina Pacis Meyer [Freiburg: Herder, 2004], 284). If this principle demands belief in her Assumption, it seems reasonable that it could at least cause reflection on the question of whether Mary's dying would *detract* from the perfection of her redemption.

⁴³ In addition to this, Griffiths notes the theological benefit such a pursuit: “Addressing it [the question of Mary's death] brings clarity about the relation between sin and death,

It will be clear from what follows, but I should note at the outset that although the conclusion that Mary did not “go the way of all the earth” follows most naturally from the established principles of Catholic theology—especially the dogmatic proclamations about Mary made in the past two centuries—there are good reasons for non-Catholics to consider this question as well. In order to open this discussion to a diverse audience, I have tried to approach the issue from several directions: theological, biblical-typological, historical, and speculative. Among other things, my consideration of the theological grounds for believing that Mary was preserved from death appeals to the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Though he took the position that Mary died as a result of her contracting original sin and in order to be conformed to the death of Christ, reading Aquinas in light of the truth of the Immaculate Conception proves to be, I think, a valuable exercise. The Bible does not speak of the end of Mary’s life in narrative form, but this does not mean there is a complete want of Scriptural support for her immortality. My biblical consideration of the issue takes the form of a typological reading of the creation account in Genesis along with a brief examination of John’s Apocalypse and a reflection on the atonement ritual as described in the book of Leviticus. The historical evidence to be considered is actually, as some have pointed out previously, the *lack* of evidence relating to Mary’s earthly end from very early on, as well as a long tradition of linguistic ambiguity in speaking of her end. I will conclude with a speculative account of Mary’s Dormition considered as the ecstatic, but not actual, separation of soul from body brought about by Christ’s granting his mother’s longing to see him in his heavenly glory. Since Orthodox theologians have themselves pointed out that the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception ought to entail Mary’s freedom from death, but that the Dormition tradition clearly assumes her death (and thus one of these must be wrong), it is my intention that the last section be taken as a possible way of reconciling the two positions.

Theological Considerations

A common way to approach the question of Mary’s immortality is to consider the connection between sin and death.⁴⁴ The inseparable

and there is no doubt that the proper construal of that relation is of central importance to the grammar of Christian thought” (Griffiths, “Did Mary Die?” 380).

⁴⁴ According to Fr. Juniper Carol, a mid-twentieth century Mariologist who gathered and published much of the material surrounding this debate, this is really the only way of

relation of these two evils is attested throughout Scripture, but it is made especially apparent in the Pauline corpus.⁴⁵ Death, whether considered as the separation of soul and body or as the separation of the soul from God, is the result of sin. All humans are born (or conceived) under the shadow of the sin of the first parents, and all (or almost all) humans commit actual sins during their life; thus, all die at least the death of psychosomatic disintegration. But Mary, according to Catholic teaching, by grace was preserved from all sin from the moment of her conception. Thus she ought to have been preserved from all the effects of sin, of which the chief is death.⁴⁶ This is why the theological dialogue

approach. "It is precisely the nature of that nexus that will furnish the key to the settlement of the controversy All other issues may be considered 'side-issues' and will ultimately lead us back to the fundamental question which remains: what is the nature of the nexus between sin and death? And it stands to reason that since there is no agreement among theologians on this point, there can be no agreement either on the related question of Mary's death or immortality" (Juniper Carol, "The Immaculate Conception and Mary's Death," *Marian Reprints*, 27 [Dayton: University of Dayton Marian Library, 1954], 2).

⁴⁵ Rom 5:12–21; 6:16, 23; 7:5,13; 8:2; 1 Cor 15:56; Eph 2:1.

⁴⁶ "Mary's flesh, on the immortalist reading of the Assumption, always remains flesh since she does not die. She, as the living creature she is, is assumed whole into heaven. And this is most fundamentally because her sinlessness—her immaculate conception and her consequent freedom during the course of her earthly life from all particular sins—means that she is exempt from death, which is exactly the separation of soul from flesh so that the flesh becomes inanimate body and is then subject to decay and dispersal, therefore no longer available or responsive to other fleshly bodies" (Griffiths, *Decreation*, 156). Incidentally, precisely because many medieval theologians espoused the view that Mary was conceived in original sin and sanctified at some point after conception, the fact of her death was usually taken for granted. Striking, therefore, is this assertion found in Bonaventure's discussion of Mary's sanctification, given the truth of the Immaculate Conception: *si beata Virgo caruit originali peccato, caruit merito mortis*. In *III Sent*, d. 3, q. 2, sed contra. Since most Orthodox Christians resist the Catholic definition of the Immaculate Conception, they share this dilemma. "The problem for the Orthodox is the following: if Mary is free from original sin, how could she die?" (Emmanuel Lanne, "Marian Issues from an Eastern Perspective," *Studying Mary: Reflections on the Virgin Mary in Anglican and Roman Catholic Theology and Devotion*, eds. Adelbert Denaux and Nicholas Sagovsky [New York: T&T Clark, 2007], 65). Sergius Bulgakov claimed rather forcefully, "If this is how it was [Mary conceived without original sin], then the restoration of the *donum superadditum* to the Virgin Mary in the same measure as Adam possessed it before the fall, i.e., liberation from original sin, would unavoidably have to mean liberation from the power of death as well The Dormition of the Mother of God is the obvious proof of the falsity of this whole

concerning the question of the Blessed Virgin's death really gained traction after the proclamation of her Immaculate Conception in 1854.⁴⁷ Obviously, those who do not hold that Mary was immune from sin will in turn not hold that she was immune from death by virtue of being immune from sin.

Objections and Responses

For those who affirm Mary's complete purity, her deserving of death due to any defect of her own is not a matter of discussion. "All theologians agree ... that Mary was not subject to death as a penalty for sin."⁴⁸ Thus the question becomes: What would be the reason for her dying if not as a result of sin? There are several possible answers to this. One could say, with Aquinas, that all the members of the body of Christ must be conformed to the head. Christ, though having all grace of soul prior to his passion, nevertheless willed not to attain immortality save through the passion. So his members first receive grace in the soul,

theological construction" (Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 72).

⁴⁷ "After the definition of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854 the question of whether or not Our Blessed Lady died gradually became a subject of wide theological discussion and is today one of the most widely disputed Mariological questions. The impetus to further study out of which arose the present state of dispute was given by the writings of Dominic Arnaldi of Genoa who died in the year 1895. Arnaldi defended the thesis that Our Blessed Lady's complete freedom from sin demanded her freedom from the penalty of death" (Lawrence Everett, "Mary's Death and Bodily Assumption," *Mariology*, vol. 2, ed. Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M [Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co, 1957], 465).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 466. Schillebeeckx agrees: "That Mary should have died as a punishment is, of course, out of the question" (Edward Schillebeeckx, *Mary, Mother of the Redemption*, trans. by N.D. Smith [New York: Sheed & Ward, 1964], 74). Scheeben went one step further: "Neither can it be said that she was subject to death because of her mortal nature; for nature makes death inevitable only in so far as the person to whom it belongs has no supernatural claim to the eternal continuation of that nature" (Matthias Scheeben, *Mariology*, vol. 2, trans. by T. L. M. J. Geukers [St. Louis: B. Herder, 1948], 152). He immediately goes on to say, however, that she only would have a right to this claim if the economy of redemption did not require her death; and he thinks it does. Prior to 1854, of course, there was less dogmatic clarity on the issue of Mary's relation to sin, and the question of her immortality could hardly have been pursued without such clarity. In 1567, Pope Pius V rejected the claim of Michel de Bay that Mary died as a result of her contracting original sin in *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, but it would take a positive definition of faith rather than a rejection of false opinion to force theologians to consider the reason for her death.

through the sacraments; their bodies are not glorified with immortality until they have been conformed to the death of Christ through their own dying.⁴⁹ Aquinas cites Romans 8:17 in this regard: “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”⁵⁰

In response to this, I would point out that conformity to Christ does not necessarily have to be mimetic. That is, it is possible to speak of a participation in the suffering and death of Christ that does not involve a person undergoing the same physical and psychological torments that Christ experienced.⁵¹ Many monastic traditions, for example, view the voluntary cutting off (mortification) of the passions of the flesh as the primary meaning of “dying with Christ.” And in fact, the “dying with Christ” motif found in the Pauline corpus and elsewhere in the New Testament never refers to the death in the sense of the actual separation of body and soul. It refers to identification with Christ’s death in baptism, persecution suffered for the sake of the faith, the subjugation of the body to the enlightened soul, or ideas similar to these. In her sinlessness, surely Mary “died with Christ” in these ways. Yet she also shared in her Son’s suffering, as his mother, in way that no one else could. Her perfect maternal love means that she has perfect compassion, in the strongest sense of that word. Therefore, even if it was given to Mary to endure a

⁴⁹ *Summa Theologiae* (=ST) III, q. 49, a. 3, ad 3. Aquinas does not actually mention Mary here, but she is implicitly included among the members of the body, all of whom must be conformed to the head. He does address Mary’s death in the *Summa*, although in a somewhat oblique manner, in his consideration of her sanctification (ST III, q. 27). She was sanctified from original sin *in utero* as regards the personal stain, but she was not freed from the penalty to which the whole human nature is subject (a. 1, ad 3). Personal sanctification, which only pertains to the mind or soul, is what is available in the present life. Sanctification of the whole human nature, body and soul, will only happen in the resurrection (a. 2, ad 4). Just as Christ assumed mortality and other corporeal defects, though free of sin himself, so Mary was freed from sin without being freed from death and other bodily defects (a. 3, ad 1).

⁵⁰ Italics mine.

⁵¹ In stronger terms, it is *impossible* for anyone to experience exactly what Christ experienced in his passion. As it applies to Mary: “Actually, Christ died in the midst of the most bitter physical, mental, and moral sufferings, while Mary’s death is usually depicted as some sort of sleep and loving slumber. Rather than being similar to the death of Christ such a death presents a striking contrast and fails to verify the very *ratio* for which it is alleged, i.e., assimilation to her Son’s death” (Farrell, “The Immortality of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” 600).

cruel martyrdom, as with the Apostles, no pain could compare to the pain of standing at the foot of her child's cross; there her own heart was pierced, and no other suffering on her part would conform her more perfectly to Christ's suffering than this.⁵² In addition to all this, there is the question of the second coming of Christ, at which Paul appears to suggest some of the faithful will be living and thus will not undergo death in the usual sense.⁵³ Could not the Blessed Virgin, having already endured her own passion, be transformed from mortal to immortal without her experiencing a real separation of soul and body?⁵⁴

⁵² "As she saw her own lamb being dragged to slaughter / Mary, the ewe-lamb, worn out with grief followed" (Romanos the Melodist "On the Lament of the Mother of God," in *On the Life of Christ*, trans. Ephrem Lash [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995], 143). The most poignant laments are found in the Holy Friday compline service of the Eastern rite:

The pure Virgin Mother wept as she took Him on her knees; her tears flowed down upon Him, and with bitter cries of grief she kissed Him. 'My Son, my Lord and God, Thou wast the only hope of Thine handmaiden, my life and the light of mine eyes; and now, alas, I have lost Thee, my sweet and most beloved Child. Woe is me! Anguish and affliction and sighing have taken hold of me,' cried the pure Virgin, bitterly lamenting, 'for I see Thee, my beloved Child, stripped, broken, anointed for burial, a corpse In my arms I hold Thee as a corpse, O loving Lord, who has brought the dead to life; grievously is my heart wounded and I long to die with Thee,' said the All-Pure, 'for I cannot bear to look upon Thee lifeless and without breath.'

The Lenten Triodion, trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 618–9. In Maximus's biography of Mary, it is at the foot of the cross that "the good and most blessed mother received the new and perpetual *immortality*" (*The Life of the Virgin by Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Stephen J. Shoemaker [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012], 112, italics mine).

⁵³ 1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:17. Andrew of Crete, in one of his homilies delivered for the Dormition feast, even in the midst of trying to emphasize that Mary herself did not escape the laws of nature, admits that "there are indeed some, in fact, who will not escape it [death]; but 'they shall be changed,' according to divine revelation" (*On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*, trans. Brian Daley, S.J. [Crestwood: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1998], 118).

⁵⁴ If we go by the testimony of the earliest hagiographical accounts of the end of Mary's life, it is very much like an anticipation of the second coming of Christ. He appears, calls for his Mother to come to him, and she ascends in the wholeness of her person to his side in heavenly glory. If this is a valid way of looking at it, then Mary would represent

Along lines similar to the first objection, one could say that Mary, like her son, was not bound to die but submitted to death by an act of her will, either out of her own desire to share in the suffering of Christ or as a result of the strength of her affection.⁵⁵ This is one track Matthias Scheeben took: "According to a genuinely theological and universal opinion dating from the Middle Ages, the nature of Mary's death resembles that of Christ in this, that Mary voluntarily accepted the unmerited death out of humble and loving obedience and without doubt actually died of love."⁵⁶ The problem with this is that the conditions for its being true are unacceptable. In the case of Christ, his death was voluntary in the sense that he left himself at the mercy of the mob; this was something Christ himself makes clear he could have avoided if he wished, and in the end he "gave up his spirit" as an act of the will. The fact of the Incarnation in itself did not subject Christ to mortality, due to the Word's life-giving power being communicated to his flesh through the union of divinity and humanity. He willed to let himself be killed in order to bring about the redemption of humanity through his passion and resurrection. In Mary's case, however, there is no evidence to ground the claim she was killed. Therefore, if she was not subject to death by virtue of her freedom from sin, and if she was not killed by an external force, one would have to assert that a higher power was the cause of her death. This is because it does not lie within the power of the human will, by that power alone, to separate body and soul. Just as it does not lie within human power alone to join body and soul.⁵⁷ Of course a human

the pilgrim Church at Christ's coming, the members of which will undergo their transformation into glory without the disintegration of their psychosomatic unity.

⁵⁵ Christ did not *contract* death and other defects or weaknesses because the humanity he received from Mary was without sin, says Aquinas; rather, he *assumed* them (*ST* III, q. 14, a. 3).

⁵⁶ Matthias Scheeben, *Mariology*, vol. 2, 153. Scheeben actually echoes a thought going back at least to St. Francis de Sales. See his *Treatise on the Love of God* 7.13.

⁵⁷ In the apt words of Cyril of Alexandria, "It does not pertain to any one of us, nor to any common man, to have the authority to lay down his life" (Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John Anthony McGuckin [Crestwood: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1995], 127). Thomas Aquinas also addresses this in his commentary on Christ's admission of the voluntary nature of his death and resurrection: "Now nature is not subject to the will of any mere human, since nature, as well as the will, are from God. Therefore, the death of any mere human person must be natural Thus, according to the pleasure of his will, [Christ] could lay down his life when he willed, and he could take it up again; no mere human being can do this, although he could voluntarily use some

can will to cause death, and when this is actualized in reference to oneself it is called suicide. It is clearly unacceptable to ascribe this to the Blessed Virgin,⁵⁸ but it is also quite problematic to hold that her death was purely an act of the divine will. Death, along with sin and the devil, has always been considered an enemy of God and the very thing from which God means to deliver us. Death is an evil, through which or in spite of which God can bring good, but of which God cannot be the cause.

One could respond that death is only an evil inasmuch as it is related to sin, and since Mary's death came about through love as opposed to sin, her death should not be considered an evil and thus God could be the cause. This is not satisfactory, however, for two reasons. First, because the reason for her dying would still be dependent on the death of Jesus, which *is* inextricably related to sin. Second, even if we concede that her death was not related to sin in any way, it would still involve the disintegration of her humanity for however brief a period of time. And if we accept the definition of evil as the absence of a good where that good ought to be present, then the separation of a human body and soul is always an evil, whatever be its perceived cause.⁵⁹

instrument to kill himself" (*In Ioan.* X, lec. 4, 1425; *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 9–21*, trans. Fabian Larcher, O.P. [Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013], 53). See also the comments of White, who confirms Aquinas's thought: "Just because this man is God and only because he is, he can also *as man* decide freely whether he wishes to be subject to the vicissitudes of human suffering and embrace the passion. It is in this sense that Christ, as the God-man, gives himself freely over to death in a way that no one else could" (Thomas Joseph White, O.P., *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* [Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2015], 358). In contrast, Germanus of Constantinople took Christ's words on the cross and applied them to Mary's passing: "She lay back on the pallet which she herself arranged, composed her immaculate body as she wished, and gave up her spirit as if she were falling asleep" (*On the Dormition of Mary*, trans. Daley, 175).

⁵⁸ I disagree with Griffiths that this is what Newman was actually claiming when he said that Mary's soul killed her body in order to reach Christ. See Griffiths, "Did Mary Die?" 395.

⁵⁹ Ultimately, I do not want to throw out the idea that the strength of Mary's love is what caused her soul to leave her body. In the last section of this essay, I try to show that it can be completely appropriated into an understanding of her death as an ecstatic experience, and that this most assuredly is a result of the reciprocal love between her and her Son.

Another objection that has been raised is that Mary would seem to be greater than her Son, the disciple greater than her master, if she avoided death.⁶⁰ But quite the opposite can be the case, especially in light of what has already been said about her co-suffering at the crucifixion, where Mary experienced something worse than her own death. Mary's immortality would only make her superior to her Son if he was bound to die and she was not. But in reality, Christ was *not* bound to die (by anything other than his perfectly free divine and human wills), and Mary *would have* been subject to death if not for the work of grace. If Christ *willed* to give his own life in order to save his mother from a certain death, this makes her greater than him no more than a drowning man is superior to the one who dies in the act of rescuing him. Where grace abounds, glory and honor abound for the one who gives. The one who receives grace may also receive honor, as indeed Mary does, but never a greater honor than the source of grace. Scheeben adds another element to this objection, in a passage that is otherwise rather strongly bent toward the immortalist position.

By reason of her freedom from original sin, Mary was in fact not subject to death as a penal debt, and consequently she was exempted from this law binding on the rest of mankind. Neither can it be said that she was subject to death because of her mortal nature; for nature makes death inevitable only in so far as the person to whom it belongs has no supernatural claim to the eternal continuation of that nature. Now, such a claim could certainly be based on the grace of the divine motherhood, if Mary had not specifically become thereby the Mother of the Redeemer, and if, in the economy of redemption, the death of the Redeemer did not require her death: not indeed as a second expiatory death, but in order that thus the Mother should not appear greater than the Son, *and especially that by her death she might*

⁶⁰ Pope St. John Paul II states this explicitly: "The Mother is not superior to the Son who underwent death" (address to a general audience, June 25, 1997. https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_25061997.html. Accessed February 23, 2018).

*prove the reality of her own human nature and that of her Son.*⁶¹

The difficulty here is that this line of thought aims to prove what something is by means of something alien to the essence of that thing. While death certainly reveals one's status as a descendant of the first humans, and while mortality is a characteristic of all embodied living creatures considered in themselves, it is foreign to the Christian vision of what it means to be human considered in the light of divine revelation. Mortality is a condition to which humanity *became* subject, by way of defect and not by way of its created condition.⁶² The constitution of humanity admits the possibility of death, but it does not require it.⁶³ So Scheeben is right to say that death proves a being not to be divine, but it would be wrong to conclude that immortality proves a being not to be human. What the immortality of a human person would prove is that such a person has received the fullness of divine grace.

Most of what I have considered so far stems from the perceived connections between sin and death. There is at least one factor pertaining to Mary's immortality, however, that is not based on this connection. It stems from the relation between the bodies of Christ and Mary.⁶⁴ Since the idea was brought to clarity in the early fifth century, it has been a standard of orthodox Christology to hold that the union between divinity and humanity in the one person of the Son of God entails some kind of sharing of properties between the two natures. Specifically with regard to Christ's body, this was used to demonstrate how the sacramental body of Christ is effective for those who receive it. The divine Word communicates his life-giving properties to the flesh with which it is united, making that flesh life-giving; this property is then

⁶¹ Matthias Scheeben, *Mariology*, vol. 2, 152.

⁶² I think of Augustine on this point: "Non enim eo modo, quo angelos, condiderat Deus homines, ut etiam si peccassent mori omnino non possent; sed ita ut perfunctos oboedientiae munere sine interventu mortis angelica immortalitas et beata aeternitas sequeretur" (*De Civ.* XIII.1; CCSL 48, 385).

⁶³ *ST* III, q. 14, a. 3, ad 2. What Aquinas calls the "remote" cause of death is the fact that humans are composed of contraries. "Sed haec causa impediabatur per originalem iustitiam. Et ideo proxima causa mortis et aliorum defectuum est peccatum, per quod est subtracta originalis iustitia."

⁶⁴ This does pertain indirectly to Mary's sinlessness, in that she was preserved from sin in order to become the Mother of God. But the effects of the union between her body and her Son's body is not directly related to the sin/death nexus.

communicated in a real but less perfect way to those who partake of it. It becomes, in the words of Ignatius of Antioch, the medicine of immortality.⁶⁵ No one, however, was more intimately united to the flesh of Christ than Mary, the one from whom he took his flesh. They literally shared body and blood for the period of gestation, the infant Jesus was nourished from Mary's body, and we can assume Mary shared in the Eucharist of the Church (out of desire, not necessity). In light of this, it must be asked, was the union of these two bodies such that the life-giving power of the Word was communicated to Mary's flesh? If the flesh of Christ is the medicine of immortality, what of the spotless flesh from which his was both derived and nourished? St. Andrew of Crete seems to hint at a sort of *communicatio idiomatum* between Christ and Mary in one of his Dormition homilies: "The body of the Mother of God, then, is a source of life [for us], because it received into itself the whole life-giving fulness of the Godhead."⁶⁶

Evidence from St. Thomas for Mary's Immortality

Thomas Aquinas presumed that the Blessed Virgin died because she contracted original sin.⁶⁷ He presumed she was conceived in original sin because he thought there had to be something of which she needed to be cleansed; if she was not in need of sanctification, then Christ is not the savior of all. And he presumed that her sanctification from original sin occurred sometime between conception and birth because he presumed that the infusion of the soul occurred sometime after conception.⁶⁸ This makes Aquinas an unlikely ally in the case for the immortality of Mary, but there are a number of ways in which he brings light to the issue.⁶⁹ The most obvious is simply the fact that the first presumption was deemed false with the promulgation of *Ineffabilis Deus*, and therefore his conclusion—that she died—can no longer be supported by that presumption. This is valuable because in his Christology Aquinas is very clear that Jesus was free from the necessity of dying precisely because he did not contract original sin, just as Thomas is clear that Mary did

⁶⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 20.

⁶⁶ *On the Dormition of Mary*, trans. Daley, 132.

⁶⁷ *ST III*, q. 14, a. 3, ad 1.

⁶⁸ *ST III*, q. 27, a. 2.

⁶⁹ Liam Walsh makes a similar claim about Aquinas aiding our understanding of the Immaculate Conception in "Thomas Aquinas, the Doctrine of Original Sin, and the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception," *Studying Mary*, 125.

contract the penalties of sin through her being conceived in original sin.⁷⁰ Following Aquinas, then, we should at least be able to end up in the position of many modern Catholic theologians: Mary died, but she was not bound to die. By Aquinas's own words, however, it almost appears unquestionable that he would have to admit Mary's immortality if he conceded that she never contracted original sin: "the faithful are now delivered by baptism from the penalty of actual sins, and from the penalty of original sin as to the exclusion from glory, yet still remain bound by the penalty of original sin as to the necessity of dying in the body because they are renewed in the spirit, but not yet in the flesh."⁷¹

The primary reason Christ assumed the defects caused by sin in his humanity was to be able to make satisfaction for the sins of humanity, death being the chief punishment for those sins.⁷² Christ's death was economical; he voluntarily submitted himself to death for the sake of his mission. And the scope of the satisfaction Christ made was beyond anything a human person could provide: "Now a mere man could not have satisfied for the whole human race, and God was not bound to satisfy; hence it behooved Jesus Christ to be both God and man."⁷³ I bring this forward in order to put more pressure on the same question asked before: What would be the reason for Mary's death, if she was free from its necessity? If the economy of salvation required the death of the

⁷⁰ *ST* III, q. 14, a. 3, resp.

⁷¹ *ST* III, q. 52, a. 5, ad 2; *Summa Theologiae, Tertia Pars, 1–59*, trans. Laurence Shapcote, eds. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 561; All subsequent references to English translations are from this edition. See also *ST* III, q. 27, a. 3, resp.: "And though, through faith in Christ, some were freed from that condemnation, according to the spirit, before Christ's Incarnation, yet it does not seem fitting that any one should be freed from that condemnation, according to the flesh, except after His Incarnation, for it was then that immunity from condemnation was first to appear. Consequently, just as before the immortality of the flesh of Christ rising again, none obtained immortality of the flesh, so it seems unfitting to say that before Christ appeared in sinless flesh, His Virgin Mother's or anyone else's flesh should be without the fomes."

⁷² *ST* III, q. 14, a. 1, resp.

⁷³ *ST* III, q. 1, a. 2, resp. "Homo autem purus satisfacere non poterat pro toto humano genere; Deus autem satisfacere non debebat; unde oportebat Deum et hominem esse Iesum Christum."

God-man, is there an economical *ratio* for Mary's actual death, besides those addressed in the previous section?⁷⁴

A third important element to take into account from Aquinas is the order of events, specifically the fact that the kingdom of heaven was opened by Christ's Passion before Mary's Dormition and Assumption. Human presence in heaven was barred because of twofold sin, original and personal. Christ both paid the punishment for original sin for all and provided for participation in his Passion so that personal sin could be removed as well, thus removing the barrier that was in place since the fall.⁷⁵ This opening of the gates of heaven, marked by the ascension of the Son in his full humanity, is what makes it possible to understand the Dormition of Mary, an event which absolutely cannot be ignored but has typically been taken to mean her real but peaceful death, as a *deathless* transition into heavenly life. Prior to the redeeming work of Christ in history, even if the possibility of immortality were granted, it was impossible for any human person to enter the kingdom of heaven.⁷⁶ We could perhaps say that by grace at her conception the subjective barrier

⁷⁴ Fr. Carol answered "yes" to this question based on Mary's role as Co-redeemer, but offered no explanation of the immediate *cause* of her death: "At any rate, if it is ever conclusively established that the Immaculate Conception did confer on Our Lady the right to immortality, then it seems that the only plausible explanation of her actual death would be her mission as Coredemptrix of the human race." Juniper Carol, "The Immaculate Conception and Mary's Death," 7.

⁷⁵ *ST* III, q. 49, a. 5, resp.

⁷⁶ Aquinas concedes that Enoch and Elijah were granted some kind of immortality but are hidden in a terrestrial paradise until the end of history. They were not admitted into the paradise of heaven (*ST* III, q. 49, a. 5, ad 2). In the *Ordinatio* of Duns Scotus, he applies this same principle to Mary in the famous article addressing whether or not she could have been conceived without original sin. In contrast to his disagreement with Aquinas on that question, here they are in agreement: "For thus God determined that although he had accepted the foreseen passion of Christ to remit original sin of all who believed and would believe in that passion, nevertheless he only remitted the punishment due to that sin—but without the vision—for the sake of the passion he foresaw, since it was exhibited as present; and therefore just as to those fathers the door was not open until the passion of Christ was exhibited, so it is probable that neither was it opened to the blessed Virgin" (*Four Questions on Mary by John Duns Scotus*, trans. Allan Wolter, O.F.M. [Saint Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2000], 53; *Ordinatio* III, dist. 3, ad auct, ad secundum rationem). Since the Passion made beatific vision possible, and since Mary did not die before the Passion, is it not possible that her being granted the vision of God could have caused the immortalization of her whole self?

to immortality was removed for Mary, and the objective barrier was then taken away by Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. This ordering of events also fits well with Aquinas's conception of how Mary grows in grace while always having the fullness of grace since her sanctification *in utero*. He observes that there is a progressive aspect to the completeness of the grace she received: first the perfection of disposition (received before she was born), then the perfection of form (received when Christ was conceived), and lastly a teleological perfection (received when she entered glory).⁷⁷ Taking her Immaculate Conception for granted, it seems that the first perfection was granted to her in anticipation of Christ's redeeming work, but her final perfection could only take place *after* Christ had first established heaven as a place humans could dwell. In other words, Mary could not have been granted entrance into the kingdom of heaven in anticipation of Christ's entrance in the way that she was preserved from original sin through anticipation of his Passion.

There is at least one more aspect of Thomas's thought that proves helpful in contemplating the possible immortality of the Virgin. It relies somewhat on what I have to say in the final section, but I will mention it here in expectation of that discussion. Aquinas accepts the principle (which, at least in the *Summa*, comes from Augustine) that the relation between soul and body is such that the perfection of the former causes the perfection of the latter. In response to the objection that Christ had no bodily defect due to the beatification of his soul, he admits that corporal glorification is the natural outcome of the soul's glory. Then he qualifies this law in the case of Christ: "Yet this natural relationship in Christ was subject to the will of His Godhead, and thereby it came to pass that the beatitude remained in the soul, and did not flow into the body; but the flesh suffered what belongs to a passible nature."⁷⁸ Closely akin to the way Aquinas says Christ's humanity was not necessarily mortal but that he assumed mortality, here he says that Christ willed to prevent the glorification of his body that would have been the natural consequence of his human soul enjoying the beatific vision. In a sermon on the angelic salutation to Mary he uses the same principle, arguing that her body was

⁷⁷ ST III, q. 27, a. 5, ad 1–2.

⁷⁸ ST III, q. 14, a. 1, ad 2.

made fit to conceive the Savior through the overflow of the grace her soul received.⁷⁹

Now, while very few theologians have posited that Mary enjoyed the vision of God while on earth, there is great mystery surrounding the moment of her “falling asleep.” It seems to me that if we combine what we know about Mary’s purity of heart, her knowledge and love of God, and the extent of the grace she received with the hagiographic and iconographic depictions of her Dormition, then there may be good reason to understand that event as the moment the glory of her enraptured soul causes the glorification of her body, in accordance with the principle acknowledged by Aquinas.⁸⁰ If Mary came to enjoy the vision of God in her final moments on earth, then it is possible her body would have thereby become incorruptible and thus unable to die. That her body was incorruptible *post mortem* is basically universally confessed by both Catholic and Orthodox tradition, so this would only amend that confession to include *pre mortem* incorruption. Her Dormition then becomes not a true death but a death-like state, due to the fact that her body would no longer need to be sustained in the way that mortal bodies do: by breathing, eating, etc.⁸¹ Aquinas already makes room for the possibility of humans *in statu viae* experiencing beatific vision, as seen in his treatment of Paul’s rapture.⁸² He sees it as likely that Paul saw the divine essence, but distinguishes between Paul’s transitory vision and the permanent vision of the saints in order to explain why Paul was glorified body and soul as a consequence of his experience.⁸³ With Mary then, it is not a question of whether she could have had such a vision but of whether she could have come to enjoy it in an abiding manner without undergoing death.

⁷⁹ *Expositio salutationis angelicae*, a. 1 (www.corpusthomicum.org; accessed Feb. 16, 2018).

⁸⁰ It is not angels but Christ himself who appears in order to bring his Mother with him to heaven, and she is always depicted as seeing him in all his glory when he comes for her.

⁸¹ On resurrected persons, Aquinas writes: “Therefore, after mortality is done away with in those who have risen, the means serving the condition of mortal life must cease to have any function.” *Light of Faith: The Compendium of Theology*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute, 1993 reprint), 177; *Compendium Theologiae* ch. 156.

⁸² *ST II-II*, q. 175, aa. 3–6.

⁸³ *ST II-II*, q. 175, a. 3, ad. 2–3.

Biblical Considerations

My search for treatments of Mary based on the witness of Scripture revealed two vastly different perspectives. On the one hand is the opinion that on the question of Mary's death, "evidence from Sacred Scripture does not exist."⁸⁴ On the other hand is the position that "all exegesis is related to Mary," because all Scripture refers to Christ and the Church.⁸⁵ If there is some truth in the latter view, and I think there is, then it would not be unreasonable to look to the Bible for guidance in the matter of Mary's possible immortality, as has been the case with other Marian doctrines.⁸⁶ The key to finding such guidance is to take a typological approach, which, unpalatable as it may be according to modern hermeneutics, has more than enough footing in the Christian tradition to justify its use. In applying this mode of reading, I take assurance especially from the precedent in tradition, but I also take some inspiration from the recent work of Matthew Levering on the Scriptural basis for the dogma of Mary's Assumption.⁸⁷ Since Protestant rejections of Marian doctrines typically revolve around the lack of biblical support for such doctrines, Levering makes the effort to defend the legitimacy of typological reading by way of conversation with three Protestant Bible scholars.⁸⁸ My observations in the following paragraphs should not be taken as an attempt to provide proof from Scripture. I intend to reach the much lesser goal of showing that there are elements which point toward the idea of Mary's immortality, if one accepts this manner of reading.

Several typological portraits of Mary have been recognized in the Scriptures throughout Christian history. The ideas with the strongest

⁸⁴ Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1982), 117.

⁸⁵ Troy Stefano, "Catholica Mater: The Marian Insights of Henri de Lubac," in *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, 180. This is de Lubac's opinion, in Stefano's reading.

⁸⁶ See, for example: Adelbert Denaux, "The scriptural basis of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Mother of God," in *Studying Mary*, 24–35.

⁸⁷ Matthew Levering, *Mary's Bodily Assumption* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2015).

⁸⁸ Peter Enns, Richard Hays, and Peter Leithart. Since I am merely making typological observations here and not arguing for the validity of such an approach, I am indebted to Levering for paving a way by which at least some Protestants might join in this discussion.

pedigree, so to speak, are those which sense a threefold connection between Eve, Mary, and the Church. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus famously compare Mary to Eve, as contributing to the redemption of humanity through her faith and obedience in contrast to Eve's unbelief and disobedience. And there developed a common reading in the age of the Church Fathers and Mothers that the Church was born from the side of the crucified Christ, as Eve came forth from Adam. Because there is such a close relation between Mary and the Church, a biblical account of her immortality naturally brings the immortality of the Church into view. My proposal attempts to give weight to the credibility of Mary's immortality, but some of the same arguments apply just as well to the immortality of the Church, though the latter issue is less contested. Since my purpose here is not to argue *that* there is good reason to hold to the Eve–Mary connection, I begin by assuming this relation.

To arrive at the conclusion that I have already made known based on the account of the creation of Adam and Eve, we have to imagine a situation counterfactual to what is actually recorded in the text. In Gen 2:18–25, the man is created first, placed in the garden of Eden, and given a mission as well as a command. The Creator then makes the proclamation that the man is lacking something by not having a partner. God forms and brings before the man many kinds of creatures, none of which appear as suitable companions. “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man,” who immediately recognizes the woman as his own kind.⁸⁹ The next event that is narrated, without any indication as to the amount of time that has elapsed, is the woman's encounter with the serpent. It is important that the woman's dialogue with the serpent revolves around the issue of death and immortality. First, the woman relates to the serpent God's word that death would be the result of their disobedience, and this is followed by the serpent's denial of the same: “You will not die.”⁹⁰ The woman is deceived, eats from the forbidden tree, and as a result of this act mortality comes to be a defining feature of humanity. Had the man

⁸⁹ Gen 2:21–22.

⁹⁰ Gen 3:4.

and the woman remained unmoving in their obedience to the divine will, immortality would have been their lot.

Notice, however, that the creation of the woman—her being brought forth from the side of the sleeping man—occurs *before* the fall. This is significant in light of the fact that since at least the early third century, as mentioned above, Christians have seen the sleep of the first Adam as a figure of the death of the second Adam and the creation of the first woman as the creation of the Church. In his treatise on the soul, Tertullian plainly states: “If Adam is a type of Christ, then Adam’s sleep is a symbol of the death of Christ, and by the wound in the side of Christ was typified the Church, the true Mother of all the living.”⁹¹ This means that even in his pristine state, the first man still had to undergo a symbolic death in order to bring about the first woman, yet there is no indication that the woman would have been subject to the same experience. Had there been no fall, both Adam and Eve would not have been subject to true death, yet Eve alone would not have even tasted death in the figurative sense. Looking forward to the realities which are figured in Genesis 2, if it has already been accepted that Mary fulfills Eve’s role through her faith and her obedience, why should we not think that the Immaculate Virgin then received what would have been Eve’s reward—immortality—had she remained without sin? This is corroborated by common belief about the Church. Once she comes forth as the body of Christ from the body of Christ, she is established for all eternity, because the one who is both her head and immoveable foundation has already conquered death and ascended into heaven. “I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it,” promised Jesus.⁹²

There is additional support for Mary’s immortality in Scripture that is not strictly typological, which may be more satisfying to some, although I

⁹¹ *Tertullian: Apologetical Works & Minucius Felix Octavius*, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, *Fathers of the Church* 10 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 277. Si enim Adam de Christo figuram dabat, somnus Adae mors erat Christi dormituri in mortem, ut de iniuria perinde lateris eius vera mater viventium figuraretur ecclesia (*De anima* 43.10). One of Karl Rahner’s earliest works, *E latere Christi*, traces the early development of this idea and concludes that it is reasonable to believe it originated in the apostolic era. (*Spiritualität und Theologie der Kirchenväter, Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3 [Freiburg: Herder, 1999], 57).

⁹² Mt 16:18.

believe it does not carry as much weight. The woman in Revelation 12 has long been identified as both Mary and/or the Church, among other referents, with the child she bears being either Christ himself or the members of his body.⁹³ Putting aside the possible connection with the ark of the covenant that appears in the heavenly temple at the end of the preceding chapter, Revelation 12 begins with “a great sign” appearing in heaven, that of a celestial woman preparing to give birth. Next comes the vision of a dragon poised to consume the woman’s child. “And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne.”⁹⁴ Immediately following this, the woman finds refuge in the desert (‘wilderness’ in most translations), “where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.”⁹⁵ This the first of two accounts in this chapter where the woman finds refuge in this divinely appointed place. The next comes after a brief description of Satan’s being cast to the earth and an announcement of the victory of Christ and his faithful over the devil.

So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her

⁹³ Balthasar thinks it impossible that the author did *not* have Mary in mind: “It is unthinkable that a Christian writer at the end of the first century, using the image of Zion in labor and giving birth to the person of the Messiah, should not have had in mind the physical Mother of Jesus, particularly if he was close to the compiler of the Fourth Gospel.” Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama III*, 335.

⁹⁴ Rev 12:5.

⁹⁵ Rev 12:6.

children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.⁹⁶

This whole vision can obviously be taken any number of ways, but at a sort of base level what is depicted is the dragon's desire to destroy the woman, who is preserved by divine power from its rage. She is not explicitly mentioned again after this.

The woman's being protected from the dragon in itself points to her escaping death, and her preservation is all the more striking against the backdrop of the rest of the book, wherein the faithful more often than not are specifically given over to evil forces. They are not spared death but overcome evil through their willingness to suffer and die for the good. The woman's preservation is easily understandable if we take her to be Zion, the heavenly city. The Messiah proceeds from her, she begets children on earth who will one day be her eternal citizens, but she herself remains in the heavenly realm until the old creation is transformed into the new. Only then does she descend as the bride of the Lamb.⁹⁷ But when we contemplate the woman as the Virgin Mary, it seems almost unavoidable to take her escaping the dragon (not only once, but three times) as her being preserved from death. That this is a work of grace is made clear: her hiding place was prepared for her by God, she was given wings to reach it, and the earth swallows the floodwaters meant to drown her. On its own, of course, this episode does not reveal that the woman was saved from the clutches of death indefinitely. It gestures in this direction, and it certainly leaves open the possibility.⁹⁸

On a final note, there is a loose but interesting connection between Revelation 12 and Leviticus 16 which lends further support to Mary's immortality. The woman in the Apocalypse avoids the dragon by going into the wilderness, where God has made a place for her. The child she has just birthed is "snatched up" to the throne of God. Between the two accounts of her going to her place in the wilderness, there is the scene of the great angelic battle which ends in Satan being cast to the earth. Then comes a chorus of praise from the heavens, in which it is proclaimed that

⁹⁶ Rev 12:13–17.

⁹⁷ Rev 21:2.

⁹⁸ On this, Epiphanius of Salamis writes: "Perhaps this can be applied to her [Mary]; I cannot decide for certain, and I am not saying that she remained immortal. But neither am I saying that she died." (*The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, trans. Frank Williams [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 609.)

the saints overcame their accuser by the blood of the Lamb. If we identify the woman's child with the Lamb, then the picture emerges of the woman's being kept safe from the dragon while her child reaches heaven only after letting himself be led "like a lamb to the slaughter."⁹⁹ The woman avoids death; the child endures death in order to overcome it. The parallel in Leviticus 16 is the two goats that together remove and make atonement for the sin of Israel. One must be slaughtered as a sin offering; the other bears the sins but gets to live; it is led out into the wilderness and there set free.¹⁰⁰

The relation between the day of atonement and the work of Christ has long been the subject of discussion. Some have seen in the two goats the dual natures of Christ, while others have seen Christ only in the animal that is killed, and there have been numerous other interpretations. The primary theological objections, I imagine, to my suggestion of reading Mary as the animal that is spared would be either that this puts too much weight on her role in the redeeming work of Christ (because he alone is the one that bore the sins of the world) or that it risks diminishing the honor due to Mary (since the scapegoat has also long been seen in a negative light, especially in Jewish literature but also in Origen, for example). In response to the first, there is ample reason, attested to in the tradition of Marian reflection, to consider the Blessed Mother as bearing sin in a way analogous to the way Christ bore the sin of the world. Even if one hesitates to honor her with the titles 'Mediatrice' or 'Co-redemptrix,' she is still one who in her own complete purity had to give her innocent Son as a sin offering, participating in the economy of salvation by offering the one who offers himself.¹⁰¹ At the very least we

⁹⁹ Is 53:7.

¹⁰⁰ Radner points out that the medieval *Glossa ordinaria* on Leviticus 16 notes that "the desert goes so far as to reach the 'bosom of the Father'" (Ephraim Radner, *Leviticus*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 168). In contrast to the wilderness being a place of death, one thinks of the promises God makes in Isaiah to turn the desert into the very place where we meet God: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for God" (Is 40:3). To complete the parallel: the beloved disciple of Jesus was the one chosen, at the cross, to lead Mary into her desert.

¹⁰¹ "After this manner the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting

must say that she had to bear the sins of the people inasmuch as she had to bear the suffering of her dear Son, although this maternal compassion is amplified in her by virtue the strength of her love.¹⁰² Jean-Jacques Olier, founder of the Sulpicians, sees Mary as becoming—at the cross—the mother of sinners and thus “feeling herself charged with their sins and obliged to satisfy for their crimes,” which she does through offering her Son.¹⁰³ This actually makes the Marian aspect of Leviticus 16 even more pronounced, if Mary is viewed as representing Israel (not merely figuring Israel, but actually being the representative of the chosen nation), the one who brings the Messiah into the world. The second objection really only applies if the scapegoat or ‘Azazel’ is decidedly negative in its connotations, but most commentators highlight the uncertainty attached to ‘Azazel.’ The Christian exegetical tradition leans heavily toward a positive reading.

Historical Considerations

It is a bit misleading to present the content of this section under the heading “historical.” There is scant historical evidence of any sort related to the life of the Virgin, either textual or material. What Pope Benedict XVI said about the Assumption would apply to the question of Mary’s avoiding death as well. “So it is clear that the point at issue cannot be historical tradition of an historical fact; the affirmation [of the Assumption] is misunderstood if it is considered or presented as such In this way it [the Bull of 1950] clearly defines the content of the article of faith as a theological, not an historical, affirmation.”¹⁰⁴ What stands out in the

herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth.” *Lumen Gentium* §58.

¹⁰² As I said in a previous section, since the Mother of God has perfect maternal love, the suffering of her child causes her to suffer to a greater degree than any harm that might come to herself. This is why, if indeed she was preserved from death, this preservation does no damage to the fact that all the members of Christ must be conformed to his suffering. For Christ’s mother, *his* suffering simply is her suffering and thus her being conformed to it.

¹⁰³ Jean-Jacques Olier, *Vie intérieure de la Très-Sainte Vierge* (Paris: Librairie Poussielgue Frères, 1875), 221. This is referred to in Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama III* (311). In a similar way, Modestus of Jerusalem presents Mary as cooperating in the atonement made by Christ: “he has decreed that he will take you as his partner, in order to provide forever a propitiatory sacrifice for all humanity, as you intercede for them.” *On the Dormition of Mary*, trans. Daley, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church’s Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 72–3. This does not

tradition regarding the historicity of Mary, given the esteem which with she has been honored since a very early time, is the lack of objects connected with her, the lack of surety about geographical sites connected with her, and the “cultivated vagueness” with which the earliest legends of the end of her life are shrouded.¹⁰⁵ Because it has often been claimed that the constant witness of tradition is that Mary died, here I only aim to present some evidence to the contrary from some of the earlier sources.¹⁰⁶

One of the most famous and oft quoted passages is from the *Panarion* of Epiphanius, probably written in the 370s. Apparently responding to two sects, one that treated Mary as divine and one that failed to give her proper honor, Epiphanius relates that there is no tradition regarding the end of her life, neither in Scripture nor in the memory of the Church. And he explicitly says the same about her mortality, refusing either to commit to or deny the fact that she died.¹⁰⁷ In most cases, admission of ignorance such as this is not a matter of great consequence. In this case, it is significant because by the time Epiphanius wrote it was already an established tradition in Christianity to honor the relics of illustrious members of the body of Christ (martyrs, for instance), and the practice of memorializing locations associated with Christ and his saints was beginning to more common as well. Combined with the honor we see given to the person of Christ’s mother as early as

mean that the Assumption is to be taken as a myth. It is taken as a real event in history, but it is proved through theological rather than historical sources.

¹⁰⁵ In the introduction to his translation of early Dormition homilies, Daley observes that such vagueness is one of the primary common features of those homilies. He goes on to say: “As I have mentioned, it is clear that from the late sixth century until the tenth ... virtually all treatments of the end of Mary’s life accept the belief that she died, was buried, and was raised from the tomb to heavenly glory within a few days of her burial. Nevertheless, it is striking that the authors of these homilies, like the broad ecclesiastical tradition since their time, consistently avoided the language of death and resurrection in speaking of Mary’s end” (*On the Dormition of Mary*, trans. Daley, 27).

¹⁰⁶ For a survey of these sources, see Walter Burghardt, “The Testimony of the Patristic Age Concerning Mary’s Death,” *Marian Studies* vol. 8.1 (1957). For a thorough investigation, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Martin Jugie, *La mort et l’assomption de la Sainte Vierge, étude historico-doctrinale* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944).

¹⁰⁷ *Panarion* 78.11; *Griechische christliche Schrifsteller*, Epiphanius 3.462. See also Daley’s discussion of this in *On the Dormition of Mary*, 5–6.

the second century, it is somewhat remarkable that by the end of the fourth century there is no set tradition concerning the circumstances of her final days.¹⁰⁸ Add to this that there have never been official claims to either possession or knowledge of first-order type relics of Mary.

It was not until the late fifth century that a recognizable leap in Marian devotion took place and shortly thereafter when Dormition festal orations began to appear.¹⁰⁹ It is true that these homilies speak of Mary's death, but they do so with a great sense of mystery and sometimes even disbelief at the thought of the Mother of God's facing death. The reader comes away with the sense that the authors were perplexed about how to speak of her dying. To demonstrate this, I simply note such language from a variety of sources.

John of Thessalonica ends the opening words of his homily on the Dormition by stating rather plainly, "When some time had gone by, this glorious virgin, the Mother of God, left the earth by a natural death."¹¹⁰ After this, however, leading up to his portrayal of her passing, he does not use the word "death," preferring instead to call it her "departure from the body." The reason why becomes clear in the words John puts in the apostle Peter's mouth when the latter delivers a speech to those who are gathered to bid farewell to Mary: "For the light of her lamp fills the world, and will not be quenched until the end of the ages, so that all who wish to be saved may take courage from her. Do not think, then, that Mary's death is death! It is not death, but eternal life."¹¹¹ When Christ comes for Mary as he promised her, she utters her final few words, then John writes, "And having said this, she brought the course of her life to its fulfillment, her face turned smilingly toward the Lord. And the Lord took her soul."¹¹² Demonstrating how un-deathlike this event was though, John then has the apparently inanimate body of the Virgin acting as if

¹⁰⁸ Farrell, "The Immortality of Mary," 595: "The significance of Epiphanius' contribution to the present question is not which of the three hypotheses he personally held, but the fact that he knew of no apostolic tradition affirming that the Blessed Virgin died."

¹⁰⁹ The earliest Greek homilies are from around the early 600s. There are earlier texts in Syriac, such as the poetry of Jacob of Serug. Jacob mentions Mary's death, but he does not go into the level of detail that the Greek authors do. See Homily V in *On the Mother of God*, trans. Mary Hansbury (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1998), 89–100.

¹¹⁰ *On the Dormition of Mary*, trans. Daley, 47.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 63.

animate: “the very body of the holy Mother of God cried out before everyone and said, ‘Remember me, King of Glory! Remember me, that I am your creation; remember me, that I guarded the treasure entrusted me.’”¹¹³

Theoteknos of Livias, writing in the same period as John of Thessalonica, focuses more on the Mary’s transference to heaven than on the actual moments surrounding her falling asleep. Like John, he admits her death, but immediately qualifies it. “And even though the God-bearing body of that holy one did taste death, it was not corrupted; for it was kept incorrupt and free of decay, and it was lifted up to heaven with her pure and spotless soul.”¹¹⁴ This comes after Theoteknos had already argued that, whatever happened to Mary, it was greater than what happened to Enoch, of whom Scripture speaks as avoiding death.

In the homily attributed to Modestus of Jerusalem, which is most likely not original, the author makes it known that his aim is to feed the minds of the faithful who want to know more about the mystery of the Dormition, since the sacred writings do not reveal anything relating to it. He consistently refers to the event as the falling-asleep of the Mother of God or the completion of her temporal life rather than her death. She receives unique privileges because of her unique relation to Christ. “The Mother of God has come to this true vine that she brought forth, to harvest the grapes of incorruption and immortality.”¹¹⁵ Like all the ancient accounts, Ps-Modestus has Christ coming to appear to Mary, but this account seems to present her seeing Jesus as the impetus of her soul leaving her body. “And that blessed one, gazing on him and deeply moved, as always, by the holy yearning of her divinely maternal heart, left her holy body behind and ‘committed into his hands’ her blessed, holy soul.”¹¹⁶ The author then expresses astonishment at the thought that “she who gave birth to the life and resurrection of the world” would fall asleep.¹¹⁷

From the early eighth century come several homilies on this theme by Andrew of Crete. St. Andrew clearly grapples with the tension he perceives in the fact of the Dormition between Mary abiding by but also

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 98.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

superseding in some way the laws of nature. And he is not ashamed to admit his perplexity. "I have tried to utter her praise in a funeral oration, though clouds cover her ascent from view, though a spiritual mist swirls around any logical explanation of her mystery and does not allow us to express clearly the understanding which the mystery conceals."¹¹⁸ He wants to communicate that "she obeyed the laws of nature, and" therefore "reached the end of life."¹¹⁹ But then he adds, "Consider, then, if there is any greater miracle on record than what has been accomplished so astonishingly in her. The law of nature has at least grown weak, and slowly falls away."¹²⁰ Andrew tries to resolve the tension by making the sleep of Adam, when Eve was formed from his side, analogous to Mary's Dormition.

Indeed, if I must speak the truth, the death that is natural to the human race even reached as far as Mary: not that it held her captive as it holds us, or that it overcame her—far from it! But it touched her enough to let her experience that sleep that is for us, if I may put it this way, a kind of ecstatic movement towards the things we only hope for during this life, a passage that leads us on towards transformation into a state like that of God. Mary's death was, we might say, a parallel to that first sleep, which fell upon the first human being when his rib was removed to complete the creation of our race In the same way, I think, she fell into a natural sleep and tasted death.¹²¹

So even though he thinks it important to maintain that Mary died, that her soul and body were separated, Andrew also seems to want to make room for interpreting this "death" in a non-literal way.

Germanus of Constantinople adds to what we have seen so far that the Theotokos underwent death in order to prove the full humanity of her Son. Christ was "the son of a real mother who was subject to the laws of natural necessity [She] had a body just like one of us, and therefore

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 114.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 104.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 109.

¹²¹ Ibid., 121. This is one of several sources which provide some corroboration from tradition for the proposal I put forward in the final section of this essay.

[she] could not escape the event of death that is the common destiny of all human beings.”¹²² Still, Germanus confined himself to what had by this time become the received tradition of the Church that Mary’s body suffered no decay after death. And this makes her death decidedly unnatural, decay being the natural consequence of death. Germanus states that such a condition was impossible in Mary’s case. “Since he who emptied himself into you was God from the beginning, and life eternal, the Mother of Life had to become a companion of life, had to experience death simply as falling-asleep.”¹²³ He describes the moment of her Dormition in this way: “She lay back on the pallet which she had herself arranged, composed her immaculate body as she wished, and gave up her spirit as if she were falling asleep. Or I should say, she left her flesh behind while fully awake, departing from it in a way free of all corruption.”¹²⁴

The same reticence to call Mary’s end plainly “death” is seen in John of Damascus. He does not see how the Virgin could have avoided something that Christ did not refuse, but what she experienced was so unlike death that the term “death” is not the best word to describe the event. “What, then, shall we call this mystery concerning you? Death? But even though your holy and blessed soul was separated from your privileged, immaculate body ... still it did not remain in death, nor was it dissolved by corruption Therefore I will not call your holy passing a death, but rather a falling-asleep, a parting, or—more properly speaking—a homecoming.”¹²⁵ She truly experienced death, but death’s encounter with her made it something good instead of something destructive. “Blessedness was yours—not death!”¹²⁶

Apart from these homiletic sources, similar language is present in the seventh-century *Life of the Virgin*. This is an important text, being the earliest complete biography of Mary, according to Shoemaker, and one which synthesizes the various early Dormition traditions.¹²⁷ Here, the angel Gabriel makes known to Mary that her Son calls her “to relinquish

¹²² Ibid., 158.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 175.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 195.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 197.

¹²⁷ *The Life of the Virgin by Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Shoemaker, 16.

this world and ascend to the dwelling places of heaven.”¹²⁸ Throughout the text “translation” is the preferred word to describe the event, which Shoemaker renders with the more familiar “Dormition,” though he notes that it is simply a euphemism for “death.”¹²⁹ When the time came, Mary “entrusted her blessed and immaculate soul to her Lord ... and slept a sweet and pleasant sleep,” and as in her birthing of Jesus, the “Lord of natures altered the course of nature” so that she experienced no pain.¹³⁰ Christ takes care of Mary’s soul and the disciples protect and care for her body. Seeming to perceive that some might think it unfitting for the New Eve to die, the author states: “Nevertheless, it is not astonishing that the mother of life was placed in the tomb, for her son also, who is himself life and immortality, endured death in the flesh and deposition in the tomb, and by his death he destroyed death and gave life to the world.”¹³¹ Yet, unlike traditional descriptions of Christ’s dead body, Mary’s entombed body is radiant with light, such that even those who loved her most feared to touch it with bare hands.

What this sampling of texts reveals is anything but a clear and consistent tradition of proclaiming that Mary plainly died. They do often refer to her end as a “death,” though the tendency is to use more gentle language. But just as often do they retreat from describing it as a real death, and on occasion explicitly deny that Mary could be conquered by death. It appears that in the several centuries following Epiphanius’s admission of uncertainty, the Church was in the same position. There were legends of a tomb, of course, but this in itself does not entail that a death occurred, especially as some accounts had Mary’s body being assumed almost immediately after the ascent of her soul. Obviously these sources cannot be taken as historical in the strict sense, but they offer insight into the historical consciousness of the Church on the fate of the Mother of God, and it is a consciousness that is riddled with uncertainty in regard to the manner of her transition from earthly to heavenly life.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 130.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 195 n 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 136.

¹³¹ Ibid., 140.

A Speculative Proposal¹³²

Most iconographic accounts of the Dormition of Mary have her lying down in repose, eyes closed, surrounded by saints and apostles, under the loving gaze of her Son, who holds in his arms a small child. The child is universally recognized to mean Mary's soul.¹³³ So there it is—her soul and her body in separation.¹³⁴ We know, however, that separation on the iconographic plane does not necessarily translate literally into separation on the plane of truth. When the Holy Spirit is represented as a dove at the Baptism of Christ or “tongues of fire” at Pentecost, hypostatic distinction may be inferred but it does not communicate that the Spirit is in any way separated from the Father or the Son.¹³⁵ Icons are texts, and as such we distinguish between the letter and the spirit. What then might the Dormition icon be teaching, if we grant for the moment that it is not teaching Mary's death in a literal sense? In other words, is there a way to maintain the truth of the iconographic tradition apart from the position that Mary was mortal? I suggest it can be interpreted as pointing to something like a mystical-ecstatic separation of body and soul, or more simply, a rapture.

¹³² “In our opinion, no amount of speculative reasoning can rule out the fact of Mary's death which has been universally believed in the Catholic Church for so many centuries” (Juniper Carol, “The Immaculate Conception and Mary's Death,” 3). One of the main reasons I offer this account is because it still presents the end of Mary's earthly life as a *kind* of death, and thus would only require a minimal re-appropriating of the tradition to which Carol refers.

¹³³ Vladimir Lossky and Leonide Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1999), 214.

¹³⁴ Bulgakov asserts: “According to church tradition, which finds full confirmation in the liturgy and iconography, when the Ever-Virgin passed away, she handed her spirit over to her Son who had appeared in order to receive it in glory with all the holy angels.” He then goes on to distinguish her death, along with that of all mere humans, from Christ's on two accounts: the fact that Christ was active even in his death, and the fact that he was not subject to the law of death (Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, 74). Andrew of Crete is an early example of making the appeal to what it depicted in the icon: “Anyone who chooses can confirm what I am saying with his own eyes. For before the gaze of those who look on holy things with faith, there stand here clear images (εἰκόνας), eloquent representations of my passing The hollow of that rock are incontrovertible witnesses that my body lay within it, showing—in sacred art—the gracious form of my limbs.” *On the Dormition of Mary*, trans. Daley, 124.

¹³⁵ In a similar way, in the Dormition icon itself there is an element of material-spiritual discontinuity—Christ, who is inseparably united to his flesh, appears holding the soul of Mary. Do we take the image of Christ to be strictly his immaterial human soul?

The kind of mystical experience wherein the subjects perceive the normative soul-body relation to be suspended for a period has deep roots in the Christian tradition, going back to the Scriptures themselves. There is Paul's account of someone, possibly himself, being "caught up to the third heaven," in which he explicitly draws attention to the uncertainty of the state of the body.¹³⁶ Then there are multiple episodes of prophetic visions of heavenly or spiritual realities that could be classified as ecstatic experiences. However, the sources which are more substantial, in the sense that the descriptions of the experiences are more detailed, are found in monastic literature. With Mary, obviously there would be no account of her ecstasy (other than what onlookers, if there were any, perceived) if it coincided with the end of her earthly life, but there is enough testimony about such experiences from other saints to warrant speculation on the matter, especially when combined with the theological considerations and the hagiographical testimony.

Clearly this is not the place to survey the phenomena of ecstatic experience in Christian history.¹³⁷ What I will do instead is use the autobiographical accounts of ecstatic experience by two figures, Symeon the New Theologian and Teresa of Avila, as guides into how we might imagine the Dormition of the Theotokos as a rapturous event. I chose these two, representatives of East and West, because they are known for the vividness and intimacy with which they describe their encounters with God; both faced skepticism during their own time, and both are now honored with the highest titles (Theologian and Doctor) of their respective traditions.

Symeon relates one of his many experiences in a catechetical discourse delivered to the monks at his monastery.¹³⁸ He begins by describing his yearning for the illumination spoken of by his spiritual father. "So great ... was my desire and longing for such a blessing that as I thought thereof I forgot all things earthly and heavenly, to the extent even of eating and drinking and bodily relief."¹³⁹ Then, after receiving

¹³⁶ 2 Cor 12:2–4.

¹³⁷ A good place to begin such a survey is the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: ascétique et mystique doctrine et histoire*, bk. IV, pt. 2, ed. André Rayez and Charles Baumgartner, S.J. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1961), under the entry "Extase," col. 2072–171.

¹³⁸ *Catechesis* 16; Symeon the New Theologian: *The Discourses*, trans. C.J. de Catanzaro (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 198–203.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, §1, 198.

guidance from his elder and the directive to pray the Trisagion before going to sleep, he relates the following.

So I entered the place where I usually prayed and, mindful of the words of the holy man I began to say, 'Holy God.' At once I was so greatly moved to tears and loving desire for God that I would be unable to describe in words the joy and delight I then felt. I fell prostrate on the ground, and at once I saw, and behold, a great light was immaterially shining on me and seized hold of my whole mind and soul, so that I was struck with amazement at the unexpected marvel and I was, as it were, in ecstasy' Whether I was in the body, or outside the body,' I conversed with this Light It expelled from me all material denseness and bodily heaviness that made my members to be sluggish and numb ... it seemed to me as though I was stripping myself of the garment of corruption In a marvelous way there was granted to me and revealed to me the manner of the departure from this present life.¹⁴⁰

In another discourse, during one of these times of "ascent," God himself speaks to Symeon and describes what he is experiencing: "Behold, though you are subject to death, you have become immortal, and though you are ruled by corruption you find yourself above it."¹⁴¹ Symeon's biographer relates that because his *soul* had become so intent on communion with God, his *body* was only constrained by its needs (sleep, food, water) when Symeon willed it so.¹⁴²

There are several themes appearing here that recur throughout Symeon's reporting of his experiences: intensity of desire, the shedding of tears, illumination, and a perceptible state of ecstasy coinciding with

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., §3, 200–1. Niketas gives his own details about this or a similar event, where Symeon perceives his own body being transfigured, during which he hears a voice from heaven saying, "This is how it has been determined that the holy ones who are alive and who remain are to be transformed at the last trumpet, and in this state caught up, as Paul says" (*The Life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian by Niketas Stethatos*, trans. Richard P. H. Greenfield [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013], 157).

¹⁴¹ *Catechesis* 17, §6; Ibid., 205.

¹⁴² *The Life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian by Niketas Stethatos*, trans. Greenfield, 81.

an altered relation between soul and body. Compare this to the account of Mary's Dormition in the *Life of the Virgin* attributed to Maximus the Confessor, where there is remarkable similarity in thematic overlay.¹⁴³ Knowing through angelic communication that her Son is coming for her, she prepares her dwelling “as a bridal chamber worthy to receive her immortal bridegroom and all-gracious son, because she was waiting with steadfast hope.”¹⁴⁴ After her friends arrive and she informs them about the impending event, she lies down on “the bed that until that time had been bathed from night to night with the tears of her eyes in longing for her son Christ and enlightened by her prayers and supplications.”¹⁴⁵ Christ himself then appears, after the apostles arrive, and the author describes this appearance of Christ as even “more radiant” than in the Transfiguration.¹⁴⁶ The light of Christ transfers to his Mother when she catches sight of him, so that she is illumined as well. Her Son blesses her, telling her that “every grace and gift has been given to you by my heavenly Father.”¹⁴⁷ And after Christ receives her soul and she falls into a “sweet and pleasant sleep,” an “unapproachable light spread forth over the holy body.”¹⁴⁸ Her body remains shrouded in light in the tomb, and even after they discover it has been assumed into heaven, a lingering radiance still fills the tomb.

Now consider the manner in which St. Teresa describes her most profound religious experience—rapture (*arrobamiento*)—especially the effect it has on the body. “In these raptures the soul seems no longer to animate the body, and thus the natural heat of the body is felt to be very sensibly diminished: it gradually becomes colder, though conscious of the greatest sweetness and delight.”¹⁴⁹ Christ's love is so strong that “He seems not to be satisfied by literally [*de veras*] drawing the soul to

¹⁴³ The authenticity of this text as a work of Maximus is still questionable, although Maximian authorship has by no means been ruled out, as Shoemaker notes in the introduction to his translation. *The Life of the Virgin by Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Shoemaker, 6–7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2010), 119. *Obras Completas de Santa Teresa*, “Libro de la Vida” 20.3, eds. Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1974), 90.

Himself, but will also have the body, mortal though it is.”¹⁵⁰ In ecstasy, Teresa feels like she is verging on death and states that “for a great part of the time during which it is in that state, the faculties are inactive” or “suspended.”¹⁵¹ Moreover, this is not simply the perception of the saint herself but is corroborated by observers who themselves are not in a state of ecstasy. Her monastic sisters report that her pulse appears to stop and her body goes stiff, as if *rigor mortis* has set in.¹⁵² As long as the rapture lasts, “the body often remains as if dead and unable of itself to do anything,” and it stays in whatever position it was in when the rapture began.¹⁵³ The most intense part of the ecstasy is when “the faculties are lost through being closely united with God.”¹⁵⁴

Such are the characteristics of an ecstatic state according to Teresa. If we take this along with Symeon’s account, we can quite easily imagine how the Dormition of Mary could be understood as a sort of rapture *par excellence*—a moment which, unlike theirs, does not end with a return to normal earthly life but with her complete assumption into heaven. The ingredients, to put it crudely, for an ecstatic experience are there (extreme longing, personal sanctity, tears, the vision of Christ, illumination, union with God) but to a greater degree in Mary than in Symeon, Teresa, or anyone else. Obviously it may not be the case that all ecstatic experiences share these same markers, but if we take it for granted that the two accounts related above are normative, then we can understand the difficulties the ancients faced in contemplating the Dormition and thus their tendency to describe her “death” in such ambiguous terms. The enraptured Mother of God would have appeared dead, just as Teresa did to her sisters, and just as Adam in the creation of Eve. The bodies of Symeon and Teresa seem to have borne witness to the idea that the ascent of the soul and its union with God has somatic effects; namely that it tends toward incorruptibility and ceases to require

¹⁵⁰ *Libro de la Vida* 20.7; *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, 121; *Obras Completas*, 91.

¹⁵¹ *Libro de la Vida* 20.11; *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, 123; *Obras Completas*, 92.

¹⁵² *Libro de la Vida* 20.12; *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, 124; *Obras Completas*, 92.

¹⁵³ *Libro de la Vida* 20.18; *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, 125; *Obras Completas*, 93.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, 126.

sustenance. If Mary experienced something like this, the state of her soul would certainly exceed that of any other saint, so we could assume that the effect on her body would be greater as well. And if we defined death based on the inactivity of the body, Mary would not have escaped death in this reading. But the Christian definition of death has always focused on the relation between soul and body, not on the state of the body itself. Thus we can rightly imagine Mary to have been in such a state that her body exhibited all the signs that we have come to associate with death—breathless, pulseless, unmoving—not as a result of her soul actually *separating* from her body but as a result of her soul becoming *united* to God in a most perfect way. This union is what the Holy Mother longed for with all the strength of her love, and as the perfect Son, Jesus graciously granted her the desire of her heart.

Conclusion

Theologically, the evidence for Mary's true immortality is both positive and negative. There are theological reasons to doubt that she was subject to death and to question the cause of her death if she was not subject to it; and then there are theological reasons which would seem to lead to the conclusion that Mary never ceased to be a living human being. Sacred Scripture offers no narrative account of Mary's life post-Pentecost, but there is typological evidence in both testaments which can be read in favor of her immortality. Historically, Christian reflection on the matter is marked by tension, perplexity, and mystery. The tendency was to admit that Mary died, with varying degrees of reluctance, but to speak of that death as unlike any other. It became traditional to refer to it as *sleep* rather than *death*, and not merely as a way of expressing the general truth after Christ that all death can be considered as sleep. Speculatively, there is evidence from testimonies of religious experience which can be used to imagine the Dormition tradition as pointing to an ecstatic death rather than a literal death, and this reading is supported by some descriptions of Mary's passing in early homilies on the Dormition. All of this together by no means leads to the certain conclusion that the Blessed Virgin was saved from death, but it should be enough to stir further reflection on the issue.

Apologia Pro Dogma Sua: Ecclesial, Anthropological, and Contemporary Global Fruits from a Potential New Marian Dogma¹⁵⁵

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On August 22, 2019, six cardinals and bishops, in representation of the world's continents, wrote an open letter to our Holy Father, Pope Francis¹⁵⁶ in which they respectfully requested the solemn papal definition of the unique role of Mary, Mother of Jesus, in the Redemption of humanity accomplished by Jesus Christ.

These global cardinals and bishops have made this public appeal to Pope Francis, as they state, in light of “so much suffering” in the world, and their grave concern that there is “more to come.”

The prelates believe that a solemn definition of Mary's unique role in the Redemption will allow Our Lady to “fully exercise her maternal mediation on our behalf.”

The full letter of the prelates to the Holy Father appears as follows:

Dear Holy Father:

As Catholic Christians, we write this letter to you out of concern for the peoples of the world. There is so much suffering. We see more coming. The world is out of balance politically, economically, morally, ecologically, and on the edge of world catastrophe. We support your heroic call for political social action, for dialogue between nations, cultures, and religions.

But, as you know, this will not be enough. Behind all these external events, a spiritual battle is taking place, more than ever, between good and evil, light and darkness, in the hearts of humanity. Here, the real battle must be fought. Humanity is in need of great conversion,

¹⁵⁵ General concepts contained in this essay were originally published in a more popular format in Mark Miravalle, “7 Reasons to Declare a New Marian Dogma Now,” *Mother of All Peoples*, revised May 28, 2020, www.motherofallpeoples.com/post/7-reasons-to-declare-a-new-marian-dogma-now.

¹⁵⁶ See www.openletterformary.com.

and of help from the Lord, from his angels, and from his Mother.

As Christians, we believe that on the Cross, Jesus Christ, our divine Redeemer, has gained full victory over Satan. We also believe that in a special way, the Lord at Golgotha entrusted his beloved people to Mary, the Spiritual Mother of all humanity. As the "Woman clothed with the Sun," clothes with the redeeming power of her Son, she stands in battle with the dragon, now more than ever before.

We need her, but she also needs us. If we honor Our Lady in the full greatness that our Lord has granted her, then she can fully exercise her maternal mediation on our behalf, and as at Cana, can intercede with her Son to do miracles in our times.

In the last two thousand years, the Church has recognized, in four dogmas, the special privileges the Father has granted Mary as the Mother of his divine Son. Yet, never has the Church solemnly recognized her human but crucial role in God's plan of salvation, as the New Eve next to the New Adam, as the Spiritual Mother of all humanity. We are convinced that the Father awaits his Church to specifically and dogmatically honor her coredemptive role with Jesus, for which he will respond with a historic new outpouring of his Holy Spirit.

As you know, many saints of our time, including St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. Maximilian Kolbe, together with over 8 million faithful, and more than 800 bishops and cardinals, have already petitioned the Holy See for this cause, since Cardinal Mercier began this movement in 1915. With our humble voices, we join them now, at this critical moment of human history.

Our Lord gave Peter the keys of the kingdom. We ask you, dear Holy Father, to use them now, in these dramatic times, and with your powerful word, in the

fullness of your office as Successor of Peter, proclaim the great role that the Virgin Mary played in God's plan of Redemption. Surely, it will release great graces for today!

In love, loyalty, and respect,

*Juan Cardinal Sandoval (Mexico, Central America),
Archbishop Felix Job (Nigeria, Africa),
Telesphore Cardinal Toppo (India, Asia),
Bishop John Keenan (Scotland, Europe),
Bishop David Ricken (USA, North America),
Bishop Antonio Baseotto (Argentina, South America),
Archbishop Denys Raboula Antoine Beylouni (Auxiliary
Patriarch Emeritus of Syriac Catholics),
and Archbishop Chucrallah-Nabil E Hage (Maronite
Archbishop of Tyre, Lebanon)*

In theological analysis of the cardinal-bishop letter, it should be acknowledged that the unique human cooperation of Mary in the saving work of Jesus Christ already constitutes the explicit and undeniable doctrinal teaching of the Papal and conciliar Magisterium for the past three centuries.¹⁵⁷ The Second Vatican Council repeatedly teaches Mary's unique role in the Redemption:

Thus Mary, a daughter of Adam, consenting to the divine Word, became the mother of Jesus, the one and only Mediator. Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption.¹⁵⁸

And again:

¹⁵⁷ Mark Miravalle, *Mary Co-Redemptrix: Doctrinal Issues Today* (Queenship Publishing Company: Goleta, CA, 2001), 41-47. For a more extended treatment, cf. Calkins, "Pope John Paul II's Teaching on Marian Coredemption," 113-147; also "The Mystery of Mary Coredemptrix in the Papal Magisterium," *Mary Co-redemptrix: Doctrinal Issue Today*, 41-47.

¹⁵⁸ Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November, 1964," in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 56 (hereafter, LG).

This union of the Mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to His death....¹⁵⁹

And again:

the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth.¹⁶⁰

And again:

She conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ. She presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in giving back supernatural life to souls. Therefore, she is our mother in the order of grace.¹⁶¹

Following the Council, St. John Paul II provided an authoritative interpretation of the Mariology contained in *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 8. During his extraordinary Mariological pontificate, the great John Paul referred to Mary as the "Co-redemptrix" on at least seven occasions, and provided the greatest quality and quantity of papal teaching on Marian Coredeemption in the history of the Church.¹⁶² Perhaps John Paul's single greatest use of the Co-redemptrix title comes in context of his 1985 homily in Ecuador:

¹⁵⁹ LG, 57.

¹⁶⁰ LG, 58.

¹⁶¹ LG, 61. Cf. Arthur Calkins, "Pope John Paul II's Teaching on Marian Coredeemption," Msgr. Arthur Calkins, 2002 (21st edition), www.christendom-awake.org/pages/calkins/jp2marcor.htm.

¹⁶² John Paul II, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1978-, V/3, 1982, 404; John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, November 12, 1984, 1; *Ibid.*, March 11, 1985, 7; John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, April 9, 1985, 12; John Paul II, *Inseg.*, XIII/1, 1990, 743:1; John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, October 14, 1991, 4.

Mary goes before us and accompanies us. The silent journey that begins with her Immaculate Conception and passes through the “yes” of Nazareth, which makes her the Mother of God, finds on Calvary a particularly important moment. There also, accepting and assisting at the sacrifice of her son, Mary is the dawn of Redemption; ...Crucified spiritually with her crucified son (cf. Gal. 2:20), she contemplated with heroic love the death of her God, she “lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth” (*Lumen Gentium*, 58)....

In fact, at Calvary she united herself with the sacrifice of her Son that led to the foundation of the Church; her maternal heart shared to the very depths the will of Christ “to gather into one all the dispersed children of God” (Jn. 11:52). Having suffered for the Church, Mary deserved to become the Mother of all the disciples of her Son, the Mother of their unity....The Gospels do not tell us of an appearance of the risen Christ to Mary. Nevertheless, as she was in a special way close to the Cross of her Son, she also had to have a privileged experience of his Resurrection. In fact, Mary’s role as Coredemptrix did not cease with the glorification of her Son.¹⁶³

Yet, the question could still be posed: if Mary’s role in the Redemption is already an established doctrine in the perennial teachings of the Magisterium, what then would be the benefit of a dogmatic definition of Marian coredemption?

Let us therefore examine *seven immediate and potentially historic benefits* to the Church that would result if in fact our present Holy Father, Pope Francis, would solemnly define the *Spiritual Motherhood of Our Lady*, which is first grounded upon her maternal role as Co-redemptrix, and inclusive of her two consequential roles of subordinate mediation as Mediatrix of all graces and Advocate.

¹⁶³ John Paul II, *Homily at Sanctuary of Guayaquil*, Jan. 31 1985, *L’Osservatore Romano*, printed in English March 11, 1985, 7.

1. Releasing Historic Grace for the Church and World: Activating Our Lady's full intercessory power for humanity

During the horrors of World War I, the renowned Désiré Cardinal Mercier of Belgium initiated a petition drive to Pope Benedict XV in 1915 for the dogma of the universal mediation of Mary, which necessarily included her roles as Co-redemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces.

What was Mercier's rationale for the new dogma? He argued that the papal definition of Our Lady's roles of intercession would lead to "great graces" and in particular, "the grace of peace" for the world.¹⁶⁴

By the early 1920s, St. Maximilian Kolbe added his voice of support for the new definition.¹⁶⁵ In 1922, Pope Pius XI formed three commissions to study the possibility of the definition. The Belgian and Spanish commissions alone produced over 2,500 pages of positive theological support for the new Marian dogma.¹⁶⁶ By 1925, over 450 bishops presented their testimonies in favor of a new dogma of Mary's universal mediation.¹⁶⁷

On December 1, 1950, the world's leading mariologists gathered in Rome and presented a *votum* to Pope Pius XII for the dogma of Mary's Universal Mediation, and this just one month after his definition of the Assumption. The Mariological basis behind the dogma *votum* was the following: now that all the providential prerogatives regarding Our Lady's earthly life have been defined, it was now time to solemnly define her heavenly roles of maternal intercession on behalf of humanity.¹⁶⁸

Momentum for a fifth Marian dogma continued to build through the 1950s and leading up to Vatican II. Hundreds of conciliar bishops had sent in preliminary requests for a definition of some aspect of Our Lady's mediation during the Council.¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, Pope St. John XXIII made clear at the Council's offset that Vatican II would not be a council defining

¹⁶⁴ Manfred Hauke, *Mary, Mediatrix of Grace*, (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2008), 129.

¹⁶⁵ Militia Immaculatae, "St. Maximilian Kolbe and the Fifth Marian Dogma," *Immaculata Magazine*, May 1997, 7-9.

¹⁶⁶ Hauke, *Mary, Mediatrix of Grace*, 66-74.

¹⁶⁷ Hauke, *Mary, Mediatrix of Grace*, 77.

¹⁶⁸ Michael O'Carroll, Csp, "Mediation," *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, (Dublin, Ireland: Michael Glazier Publication, 1983), 238-245.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

any new dogmas, but rather one pastoral in nature. Pro-dogma members at the Council would have to wait for some post-conciliar possibility for a new Marian dogma.

Since 1993, over 8 million petitions from the People of God spanning over 180 countries have been sent to recent popes in support of this dogmatic proclamation of Marian Coredemption.¹⁷⁰ These numbers from the world's *sensus fidelium* are joined with the hierarchical ranks of some 615 bishops, including 70 cardinals, since 1993.¹⁷¹ With the additions of over 200 bishops from 1915 to 1918, the total known number of bishops supporting the definition far exceeds 800, and the large quantity of potential episcopal supporters for the more than seventy years between 1918 until 1993 is known by the Holy See alone.

The communally manifest reason of support for the fifth Marian dogma over the last century appropriately mirrors that of the movement's founder of Mercier in its simplicity and profundity: the proclamation of the dogma of Mary as the Spiritual Mother of All Peoples will lead to a historic release of grace for the Church and for the world. It should therefore not be surprising that the selfsame motivation is voiced by cardinals and bishops in their 2019 open letter to our present Holy Father—*epic graces for a contemporary humanity that desperately needs them*.

What would constitute a valid theological justification for such a monumental release of grace caused by defining a new Marian dogma?

A theological argument could be made that God the Father so respects human freedom that free human assent would be appropriately required for such a historic release of grace. The Father does not force saving grace upon his human children.

The consent of humanity is therefore likewise necessary for Our Lady to fully intercede on humanity's behalf in our own day. If the pope, as Vicar of Christ on earth and supreme authority of the Church were to freely and solemnly acknowledge Our Lady's unique human role in the Redemption, (as well as her consequent roles in the distribution of the graces of the Redemption) this would thereby appropriately lead to the *full activation, the most complete possible exercise of her powerful maternal roles of intercession for the world*.

¹⁷⁰ Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici Archives, Hopedale, Ohio, U.S.A.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Just as God the Father awaited the free human fiat of one woman to bring to the world its Redeemer, so now that same human woman, glorified in heaven, awaits the fiat of one human man, the successor of Peter, to bring to the world the graces of what was called the “Triumph of her Immaculate Heart” at Fatima.¹⁷²

We see the same theological principle confirmed in the biblical institution of the papacy. For example, Mt 16:15-20, where Jesus asks the apostles the question: “Who do they say that I am?” Jesus, of course, knew who he was, *but he wanted the truth proclaimed by Peter*. Then, *and only then*, does Jesus establish the papacy and all the graces that would thereby enter the world through the papacy.

Once again, a similar phenomenon of a historic grace, it is believed, will flow upon the world once the Holy Father freely and solemnly proclaims Our Lady’s intercessory roles for humanity.

2. The Completion of Marian Dogma: Declaring Mary’s relationship with humanity as Spiritual Mother

The four Marian dogmas solemnly defined by the Church all focus on Our Lady’s providential prerogatives as granted by the Heavenly Father for her own perfection and in relation to her divine son, *i.e.*, the “Theotokos,” her threefold Virginity, her Immaculate Conception, and her bodily Assumption. Yet, none of these existing dogmas testify to *Mary’s relation to humanity*.

In a certain sense, the other four dogmas require the fifth doctrine of Spiritual Maternity in order to manifest their salvific relevance for humanity.

The solemn definition of Spiritual Motherhood would not only accentuate Mary’s saving role to the human race, but would also effectively bring to completion the “whole truth about Mary,” that is, the divinely revealed roles of Our Lady both in relation to Jesus and in relation to mankind.

How can we be sure that the definition of Spiritual Maternity would constitute the final Marian Dogma in Church history? For the simple reason that there are no remaining Marian doctrines revealed in Scripture and Apostolic Tradition to define.

¹⁷² Louis Kondor, SVD, “July 13, 1917, Message of Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima,” *Fatima in Lucia’s Own Words: Sister Lucia’s Memoirs*, (Fatima: Posulation Center, 1976), 112.

How appropriate that at the present climax of the universally designated “Age of Mary”—an age which boasts of more Marian dogmas declared, more Marian apparitions approved, and more Marian popes than in any other single period of the Church’s history—that her role as the Spiritual Mother of all peoples would be solemnly defined.

It is furthermore appropriate that the Marian truth which most specifically and foundationally supports the present climax of Marian devotion be dogmatically defined in our present historical moment. Love of Mary must be based on truth about Mary, and all the principal Marian devotions, i.e., the Rosary, Marian consecration, the Scapular devotion, etc. are all theologically grounded upon the doctrine of Spiritual Motherhood.

3. Declaring the Christian Redemptive Value of Human Suffering: Mary Co-redemptrix and the Christian’s role as “co-redeemer”

A papal definition of Mary Co-redemptrix would highlight to the world the fundamental Christian truth that “suffering is redemptive.” This dogma would inherently highlight redemptive value of human suffering, which, in a global society experiencing ubiquitous suffering, both spiritual and physical in nature, could provide a quintessential pastoral message to the contemporary Church and world.

While Our Lady’s suffering with her Crucified Son was unparalleled in its depth and in its merit, all Christians are called by St. Paul to “make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the Church (Col.1:24).” Each of us within the Body of Christ has the privilege and responsibility to join the redemptive mission of Jesus and Mary, and by the patient enduring of our sufferings and spiritually uniting them to the sufferings of our Redeemer, can contribute to the mysterious release of graces for human salvation.

St. John Paul repeatedly called the People of God to live up to the sublime call to be “co-redeemers in Christ.”¹⁷³ Pope Benedict XVI beckoned the infirmed at Fatima to become “redeemers in the

¹⁷³ Cf. John Paul II, Address to the sick at the Hospital of the Brothers of St. John of God, April 5, 1981, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, April 13, 1981, 6; General Audience, Jan. 13, 1982, *Inseg.* V/1, 1982, 91; Address to candidates for the Priesthood, Montevideo, May 8, 1988, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, May 30, 1988, 4; cf. Pius XI, Papal Allocution at Vicenza, Nov. 30, 1933, Domenico Bertetto, S.D.B., ed., *Discorsi di Pio XI* 2:1013.

Redeemer.”¹⁷⁴ A solemn proclamation of Mary as the human Co-redemptrix with Jesus would offer the Christian faithful a perfect human example to imitate in our own Christian imperative to live Colossians 1:24 and offer daily sufferings for the subjective redemption of others.

In an age where the evils of euthanasia and suicide are massively on the rise, the world could use a solemn re-emphasis that human suffering need not be futile under materialist perceptions of hopelessness and uselessness. On the contrary, human suffering can be both supernaturally redemptive and eternally meritorious when they become coredemptive.

4. Highlighting the Dignity of the Human Person and Human Freedom: The human imperative to cooperate with grace

Proclaiming Mary’s free and personal role in the Redemption would inherently proclaim the dignity of the human person as well as the dignity of one of God’s most sublime gifts to humanity: *freedom*. This dogma would recognize in a solemn expression that a free decision of a human being was a necessary element within God’s providential plan for human Redemption.

Numerous contemporary ideologies deny both the dignity of human freedom and the dignity of the human person—from totalitarian regimes like Communist China, to western syndicates of human trafficking (where its principal market is found the United States). A dogma founded on God’s respect for human freedom joined with Our Lady’s perfect exercise of it would innately pronounce the transcendent dignity of the human person and the imperative to respect human freedom in all circumstances—as does the Creator himself.

This Marian declaration would moreover underscore the perennial Catholic teaching on the human necessity to cooperate with grace for our salvation. St. Augustine declares this indispensable soteriological truth in

¹⁷⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, “Apostolic Journey of Pope Benedict XVI to Portugal on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Beatification of Jacinta and Francisco, Young Shepherds of Fatima: Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI,” The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 13, 2010, www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100513_fatima.html.

his famous maxim: “God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us.”¹⁷⁵

The historical summit of human cooperation with grace is reached in Mary’s climactic “yes” at Calvary.¹⁷⁶ Not only did she freely cooperate with the divine will for her own personal justification, but she also freely participated in the redemptive work of Christ for all humanity. Mary’s lifelong human consent as the New Eve with Christ, the New Adam represents the historical highpoint of human cooperation with grace, both personally and universally. It thus becomes the greatest model for all human cooperation with divine grace in obedience to God’s salvific plan.

The Co-redemptrix title may well be the single greatest term that most completely embodies the full Catholic doctrinal teaching on human salvation, as it necessarily includes Catholic soteriological principles such as the proper relationship between human freedom and divine providence; between grace and free will; and between faith and works.

5. Proclaiming the True Dignity of Woman: Authentic Christian Feminism as embodied in Mary

This proposed dogma would sublimely underline that the greatest act of human history—the redemption of the human family— is the result of a woman’s active and feminine “yes.”

It was the will of God that the human person to partake most intimately in the greatest divine act for humanity would not be a pope, nor a bishop, nor a priest, nor a man—but rather a woman and a mother. This speaks volumes regarding both the dignity of woman and the true theological, anthropological, and social nature and dignity of authentic Christian feminism.

The providential necessity of a woman’s contribution to the Redemption has been acknowledged throughout Christian history. In 180 A.D., St. Irenaeus refers to Mary’s feminine contribution as “the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race.”¹⁷⁷ In 1918, Pope Benedict XV authoritatively teaches: “We may rightly say that she

¹⁷⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (1997), 1847.

¹⁷⁶ Josef Seifert, “Mary as Coredemptrix and Mediatrix of all Graces – Philosophical and Personalist Foundations of a Marian Doctrine.” In *Mary, Coredemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations II, Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical*, Mark I. Miravalle, ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1996), 168.

¹⁷⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*, III.22.4.

redeemed the human race together with Christ.”¹⁷⁸ In 1993, Mother Teresa succinctly conveys the same truth: “No Mary, no Jesus.”¹⁷⁹

The Redemption of the human race is therefore both a gift from the Divine Redeemer to humanity, and at the same time *a gift from a woman to humanity*. As eloquently expressed by personalist philosopher, Josef Seifert:

This dogma would express a dignity of a woman’s action which exceeds in activeness, sublimity and effectiveness the deeds of all pure creatures and men: of all kings and politicians, thinkers, scientists, philosophers, artists and craftsmen from the beginning of the world to the end of doom, and in a certain manner even of all priests except Christ. For all other priestly actions render only present Christ’s redemptive grace and action but Mary’s act rendered our redemption itself possible and thus mediated for mankind the most high gift of our divine Savior himself.¹⁸⁰

Particularly in a time of the Church when confusions regarding the nature and role of women abound, the clarity is Mary. Proclaiming the greatness of Mary and her roles of maternal intercession for humanity will clarify in flesh the proper role of women in the Church, leading to their powerful yet humble service of women within the Body of Christ.

6. Applying Authentic Catholic Ecumenism to Mary: A Mother Unites her Children

A new dogma on Mary’s role in the Redemption would actually serve authentic ecumenism (apart from strong contemporary opinions to the contrary), based on an accurate understanding of the ecumenical mission from a truly Catholic perspective. What constitutes authentic Catholic ecumenism as delineated by the Magisterium, and how does it accurately relate to a potentially new definition of Spiritual Maternity?

The Second Vatican Council teaches:

It is, of course, essential that doctrine be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit

¹⁷⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Inter Sodalicia*, AAS 10, 181–2.

¹⁷⁹ Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *Dialogue with Author*, Missionary of Charity Motherhouse, Calcutta, India, August 14, 1993.

¹⁸⁰ Seifert, “Philosophical and Personalist Foundations,” 168.

of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning.¹⁸¹

In his papal document on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope St. John Paul II describes authentic Catholic ecumenism to consist of prayer as the soul and dialogue as the body in pursuit of true and lasting Christian unity, an ecclesial unity to be found firmly grounded within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ.¹⁸²

Concerning areas of doctrinal disagreement, such as Marian dogma or doctrine, John Paul strongly condemns any form of doctrinal “reductionism”:

With regard to the study of areas of disagreement, the Council requires that the whole body of doctrine be clearly presented ... Full communion of course will have to come about through the acceptance of the whole truth into which the Holy Spirit guides Christ's disciples. Hence all forms of reductionism or facile “agreement” must be absolutely avoided.¹⁸³

And again:

The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth. In the Body of Christ, ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (Jn.14:6), who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth?¹⁸⁴

Therefore, 1) *fullness of doctrinal truth* and 2) *greatest possible clarity of doctrine* constitute two essential and required pillars of legitimate Catholic ecumenical activity.

¹⁸¹ Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 21 November, 1964,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 11.

¹⁸² John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, Encyclical Letter, Vatican Website, May 25, 1995, www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html, 21, 28.

¹⁸³ *UUS*, 36.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

If then, the expressed purpose of a dogmatic proclamation of Mary's role in the Redemption would precisely be to best articulate the fullness of doctrinal truth and the greatest possible clarity of doctrine regarding Our Lady's Spiritual Motherhood, it cannot, by definition, constitute a violation of authentic Catholic Ecumenism. Moreover, to hold such would be to, *a priori*, rule out the charism of papal infallibility itself regarding Mary, and to, by principle, rule out the dogmatic legitimacy of the four existing Marian dogmas.

The late John Cardinal O'Connor of New York, in his letter to Pope John Paul II for the fifth Marian dogma, well expressed this potential dogma's prospective service to authentically Catholic ecumenical efforts:

Clearly, a formal papal definition would be articulated in such precise terminology that other Christians would lose their anxiety that we do not distinguish adequately between Mary's unique association with Christ and the redemptive power exercised by Christ alone.¹⁸⁵

Ironically, the same proper understanding of Ecumenism regarding this potential Marian dogma was voiced by Anglican Oxford scholar, John MacQuarrie, commonly recognized as Anglicanism's most distinguished systematic theologian in the second half of the 20th century:

The matter cannot be settled by pointing to the dangers of exaggeration or abuse, or by appealing to isolated texts of scripture such as 1 Tim 2:5, or by the changing fashions in theology and spirituality, or by the desire not to say anything that might offend one's partners in ecumenical dialogue. Unthinking enthusiasts may have elevated Mary to a position of virtual equality with Christ, but this aberration is not a necessary consequence of recognizing that there may be a truth striving for expression in words like Mediatrix and Co-redemptrix. All responsible theologians would agree that Mary's coredemptive role is subordinate and auxiliary to the

¹⁸⁵ John Cardinal O'Connor, *Letter of Endorsement for Papal Definition of Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate*, New York Chancery, February 14, 1994, *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici* Archives, Hopedale, Ohio, USA.

central role of Christ. But if she does have such a role, the more clearly we understand it, the better.¹⁸⁶

On a complimentary pastoral note, Lutheran theologian, Dr. Charles Dickson sees the acknowledgement of Our Lady's Spiritual Maternity as a positive and powerful instrument for Christian unity—a Marian "source of reconciliation" for contemporary Christians, who Dickson refers to as her "scattered and divided children":

In our time, we are still faced with the tragic divisions among the world's Christians. Yet, standing on the brink of a bright new ecumenical age, Mary as model of catholicity, or universality, becomes even more important. In the course of many centuries from the beginning of the Church, from the time of Mary and the Apostles, the motherhood of the Church was one. This fundamental motherhood cannot vanish, even though divisions occur. Mary, through her motherhood, maintains the universality of Christ's flock. As the entire Christian community turns to her, the possibility of a new birth, a reconciliation, increases. So Mary, the mother of the Church, is also a source of reconciliation among her scattered and divided children.¹⁸⁷

Within this brief discussion of ecumenism in relation to the fifth proposed Marian dogma, it is quintessentially important, and in fact long overdue, to present a historically and theologically accurate understanding of the commonly referred to "Częstochowa Commission," most notably its actual historical composition and purpose, its completely non-authoritative nature, and its totally non-binding power in relation to the proposed dogma.

In 1996, an ecumenical gathering of theologians (18 Catholic, 3 Orthodox, 1 Lutheran, 1 Anglican) during the general meeting of the International Pontifical Marian Academy in Częstochowa, Poland, came

¹⁸⁶ J. MacQuarrie, "Mary, Coredemptrix and Disputes over Justification and Grace: An Angelican View," *Mary Co-redemptrix: Doctrinal Issues Today* (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2002), 140.

¹⁸⁷ Charles Dickson, "A Protestant Pastor Looks at Mary" (Huntington, Ind: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 77.

out with a negative statement regarding the appropriateness of a Marian dogma of the Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix and Advocate following what was alleged as a “serious study” of the issue. In the new proper spirit of Church transparency, the following clarifications must be made regarding the true nature and consequent conclusions, as was later testified by original members of the commission, as well as by some officials of the Pontifical Marian Academy at the time:

1. The “commission” was not in fact a specific commission formed to make a serious study of the issue of the proposed dogma, but merely the normal ecumenical meeting of theologians which routinely accompanied the meetings of the Pontifical Marian Academy. It was subsequently made up of membership of 16 Catholic and 5 non-Catholic theologians. The members were not selected based on any expertise of the issue, nor were the members ever notified that they were acting as a formal commission of theological investigation.
2. There was *no serious theological study* of the issue of the proposed dogma but only a 20-minute presentation delivered against the proposed dogma. There was no research, study, or analysis of the issue of the proposed dogma.
3. The “conclusions” of the commission were principally written by one theologian, with more negative additions later made by members of the Vatican Secretariat of State.
4. The conclusions directly criticized several elements already contained within the magisterial Mariological writings of St. John Paul II.
5. The conclusions of the Częstochowa Commission in no way constitute an authoritative document of the Church’s Magisterium and should not be quoted as such.

The 1996 Częstochowa Commission was not, therefore, a theological commission which provided a serious study and analysis to

the issue of a possible new Marian dogma. Perhaps now, some 20 years later, would be the appropriate time to initiate a legitimate study of the issue, with a qualified team of diversified Mariological experts who could judiciously perform a balanced theological investigation into the issue.

7. Confirmation from Church Approved Private Revelation: Our Lady Wants This Dogma “Now”

Marian private revelation, even when approved by the Church, can in no way constitute the theological foundation for a Marian dogma. Yet, it can serve as a supernatural confirmation for a proposed dogma's appropriateness, importance, and even Heaven's desire for such a definition at a particular moment in the Church's history.

The ecclesiastically approved apparitions of the Lady of All Nations in Amsterdam, Holland (1945-1959) which were declared as “consisting of a supernatural origin” by the local ordinary, Bishop Punt of Haarlem-Amsterdam¹⁸⁸ (May 31, 2002) provide precisely such a heavenly confirmation. Not only do the Amsterdam apparitions ratify the appropriateness of a fifth Marian dogma for our time, they further specify this Marian dogma as a *heavenly condition for world peace*.

On April 29, 1951, the Lady of All Nations articulates heaven's desire for a new dogma of Mary as Co-redemptrix, as well of as the providential assurance of its certain outcome:

I stand here as the Co-redemptrix and Advocate. Repeat this after me: the new dogma will be the “dogma of the Co-redemptrix.” Notice I lay special emphasis on the word, “co.” I have said that it will arouse much controversy. Once again, I tell you that the Church, “Rome” will carry it through and silence all objections. The Church, “Rome,” will incur opposition and overcome it. The Church, “Rome,” will become stronger and mightier in proportion to the resistance shows up in the struggle. My purpose and my commission is none other than to urge the Church, the theologians, to wage this battle....I know well the struggle will be hard and bitter (and then the Lady smiles to herself and seems to gaze

¹⁸⁸ May 31, 2002 Declaration of Bishop Josef Marianus Punt on the Supernatural Character of the Amsterdam Apparitions, Website of Diocese of Harlaam, Amsterdam, www.bisdomhaarlem-amsterdam.nl.

into the far distance), *but the outcome is already assured.*

On May 31, 1954, the Lady of All Nations further instructs:

Work and ask for this dogma. You must petition the Holy Father for this dogma...The world is dominated by the spirit of Satan. When the dogma, the last dogma in Marian history has been proclaimed, then the 'Lady of All Nations' will give peace, true peace, to the world.

And again, in the Amsterdam message of May 31, 1955:

The world has lost its bearings? Well then, nations, put your trust in your Mother. She is allowed to come to you under this new title: Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate. Why do you not ask your Holy Father to pronounce the Dogma the Lady demands?... Once the dogma has been pronounced, the Lady of all Nations will give her blessing Then, the 'Lady of All Nations' will bestow peace. She will help you when this dogma has been proclaimed.

Our Lady's approved apparitions in Amsterdam are later confirmed by a second Church-approved apparition involving the Lady of All Nations in Akita, Japan. From 1973 to 1981, Our Lady began a series of mystical phenomena in Akita where a wooden statue of the Lady of All Nations wept tears on 101 different occasions (several times in the presence of the local bishop, Bishop John Ito). The visionary at Akita, Sr. Agnes Sasagawa, was taught the Prayer of the Lady of All Nations by her guardian angel in preparation for the mystical visitations of Our Lady. Bishop Ito approved the supernatural authenticity of the Akita events in 1984, and confirmed that these two Church approved apparitions possess an essential unity when he stated: "Akita is the continuation of Amsterdam."

Both the Marian messages Amsterdam, and Akita likewise speak of a conditional global catastrophe and other upcoming trials, for which the graces received through the proclamation of the fifth Marian dogma can serve as remedy or mitigation.

From Cardinal Mercier's initial inspiration of "great graces for the Church and world" to Our Lady's supernatural confirmation that only with the dogma of Mary Co-redemptrix can she then "bring peace, true peace

to the world” we see truly historic benefits for the Church and the world through a papal proclamation of the fifth Marian dogma.

Conclusion

For many contemporary supporters, including the author, the proclamation of the fifth Marian dogma is no ivory tower theological issue. It constitutes a providential prerequisite for historic grace and world peace—a God-ordained solemn recognition of Our Lady’s role in the Redemption and its subsequent roles in the mysterious mediation of grace and universal advocacy that is in itself a condition for the supernatural help required to remedy the ubiquitous crises threatening the world and the Church today.

Historically, a complex combination of truth and confusion, tragedy and grace, have often participated in the proclaiming of Marian dogmas. It is the author’s hope and prayer that maximum grace and minimum tragedy can be the historical conditions for the eventual dogmatic crowning of the Spiritual Mother of all Peoples in the fifth and final Marian Dogma.

The Virgin Mary's Intercessory Aversion of the Divine Wrath: Ante-Chalcedonian Foundations of Medieval Piety¹⁸⁹

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Abstract

During the medieval era, one of the most prevalent motifs concerning the mediation of the Virgin Mary was the conviction that she is able to turn away or appease the just anger of God by her maternal intercession. Unfortunately, to date no theologians or scholars have adequately traced this motif's historical origins prior to the late patristic period. To remedy such a shortcoming, this study presents testimonies from eight patristic authors prior to the Council of Chalcedon (451) who hold that the saints in heaven can avert the divine wrath by their prayers. The passages considered are taken from Origen's *Contra Celsum* and *Commentariorum series in Matthaeum*, Ephrem the Syrian's *Carmina Nisibena*, Nectarius of Constantinople's *Sermo de festo S. Theodori*, John Chrysostom's *Orationes adversus Iudaeos* and *Homilia contra ludos et theatra*, Prudentius' *Peristefanon*, Augustine's *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, Valerian of Cimiez's *Homiliae de bono martyrii*, and Rabbula of Edessa's *Supplicationes*. These texts, some of which have never before been translated into English, demonstrate that at first, the early Christians believed that the saints, and especially the martyrs, are able to avert the wrath of God. During the fifth century, however, this confidence also began to be referred by some Eastern Christians to the intercession of Mary in particular, as seen in Rabbula's *Supplicationes*.

Introduction

Those who are even a little versed in modern Mariology know that there is no shortage of treatments of our Lady's immediate moral cooperation within the subjective redemption by means of her maternal intercession or prayer. Prior to Vatican Council II, neo-scholastic theologians produced innumerable monographs, journal articles, and

¹⁸⁹ All translations of Latin and Greek patristic texts in this study are entirely my own. All translations of Syriac patristic texts are also mine, although I would like to thank Fr. Michael Shami, a newly ordained priest of the Syriac Maronite Church who is laboring towards a doctorate in liturgy from Pontificio Istituto Orientale, for kindly providing some stylistic recommendations concerning them, and for discovering a single inadvertent translation error.

sections of manuals dedicated to various aspects of Mary's intercessory mediation, including its exact nature, extent, efficacy, and basis in divine revelation, as well as the definability of the Virgin's *officium* as the "dispenser of all graces."¹⁹⁰ In recent years, these discussions have been reignited with much fervor by some contemporary Marian theologians.¹⁹¹ However, one aspect of Marian mediation which has not yet been adequately addressed by Mariologists is the popular medieval (and in some cases, even modern) motif that our Lady's maternal intercession not only obtains graces or favors for the human race, but is also capable of averting or appeasing the divine wrath on behalf of sinners.¹⁹² Even

¹⁹⁰ To avoid listing all such works, I direct the reader to the excellent bibliographies of B.H. Merkelbach, *Mariologia: tractatus de beatissima Virgine Maria matre Dei* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1939), 309–311, and G.M. Roschini, *Mariologia*, 2nd ed., vol. 2/1, *Summa Mariologiae: de singulari missione B. Mariae V.* (Rome: A. Belardetti, 1947), 231–233, 394.

¹⁹¹ Salient works published in English, French, Spanish, Italian, and Latin since 1990 are enumerated by A.I. Apollonio, "Mary Mediatrix of All Graces," in *Mariology: A Guide for Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, and Consecrated Persons*, ed. M.I. Miravalle (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2007), 411–412.

¹⁹² Many orators and theologians of the medieval West adhered to this pious belief, e.g., Ambrose Autpert, *Sermo de adsumptione sanctae Mariae* 11, in R. Weber, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis*, vol. 27B, *Ambrosii Autperti opera, pars III* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 1034–1035; Anselm of Canterbury, *Orationes* 6, in F.S. Schmitt, ed., *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), 15; Eadmer of Canterbury, *De excellentia Virginis Mariae* 12, in J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia cursus completus: series latina* (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1844–1864) [henceforth *PL*], vol. 159, 579–580; Herman of Tournai, *De incarnatione Christi* 11, in *PL* 180.37; Adam of St. Victor, *In assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis* 19–21, in C. Blume and H.M. Bannister, eds., *Liturgische Prosen des Übergangsstiles und der zweiten Epoche: insbesondere die dem Adam von Sanct Victor* (Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1915), 327; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in dominica infra octavam assumptionis beatae Mariae Virginis* 1–2, in J. Leclercq and H. Rochais, eds., *S. Bernardi Claraevallensis opera omnia*, vol. 5, *Sermones II* (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1968), 262–263; Aelred of Rievaulx, *Sermo in annuntiatione dominica*, in C.H. Talbot, ed., *Sermones inediti B. Aelredi abbatis Rievallensis* (Rome: Curia Generalis Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis, 1952), 81–82; Ekbert of Schönau, *Homilia in nativitate beatae Mariae Virginis*, in *PL* 95.1515; Nicholas of Clairvaux, *Sermo in nativitate beatissimae Mariae*, in *PL* 144.740; Philip of Harvengt, *In Cantica Canticorum* 4.5, in *PL* 203.360; Richard of St. Laurence, *De laudibus beatae*

those pre-conciliar Mariological manuals which most detailedly discuss the Mother of God's intercession are seemingly silent concerning this matter.¹⁹³ The theological upheavals of the mid-twentieth century brought about by *ressourcement* likewise failed to justly shed light upon this motif; the few figures of *la nouvelle théologie* who even address it unfortunately regard it as a novel and superstitious excess which arose only in the very late patristic East before proliferating in the medieval Latin West.¹⁹⁴

The failure to explicate how this motif ought to be properly understood within the wider framework of dogmatic theology, as well as to more intensely trace its historical origins, has arguably caused an aperture not only in discussions concerning Mary's mediation among Catholic theologians, but also in how Catholic beliefs concerning the Virgin are perceived by the Church's separated sons and daughters within Protestant communities. A number of contemporary English-speaking Protestant authors, especially of a Reformed persuasion, have taken issue with pious prayers wherein the Mother of

Mariae Virginis 2.5.3, in A. Borgnet and E. Borgnet, eds., *B. Alberti Magni opera omnia*, vol. 36, *De laudibus B. Mariae Virginis libri XII* (Paris: L. Vivès, 1898), 109; Bonaventure, *Sermones de assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis* 3.8, in J.G. Bougerol, ed., *Saint Bonaventure: Sermons de diversis*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions Franciscaines, 1993), 666; Conrad of Saxony, *Speculum beatae Mariae Virginis* 7, in Fathers of the College of St. Bonaventure, eds., *Bibliotheca Franciscana ascetica medii aevi*, vol. 2, *Speculum beatae Mariae Virginis Fr. Conradi de Saxonia* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1904), 105; Bernardine of Siena, *Sermo de salutatione angelica* 3.3, in Fathers of the College of St. Bonaventure, eds., *S. Bernardini Senensis opera omnia*, vol. 2, *Quadragesimale de Christiana religione: sermones XLI–LXVI* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1950), 162. Even the humanist Erasmus, in a *sequentia* which he composed for a mass of our Lady of Loretto in 1523, asks her, *Averte iram Dei, ne feriat fulmine noxios*; see C. Reedijk, ed., *The Poems of Desiderius Erasmus* (Leiden: Brill, 1956), 390.

¹⁹³ Perhaps the most prominent example is Merkelbach, *Mariologia*, 345–381. He dedicates three *articuli* (consisting of twenty-one *sectiones*) to meticulously explaining, with copious citation of patristic and medieval sources, the Virgin's intercessory cooperation within the subjective redemption, but nowhere treats of this motif.

¹⁹⁴ For a specimen, see H.U. von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, vol. 2/2, *Die Personen des Spiels: Die Personen in Christus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1978), 288.

Jesus is said to currently appease or turn away the anger of God.¹⁹⁵ In most cases, their Catholic interlocutors have addressed neither how such language should be rightly interpreted, nor whether it is simply a product of medieval superstition, or rather an ancient motif with a noteworthy patristic background.

In light of the theologian's duty to accurately explain popular Christian piety, especially in our age wherein Catholic practices and beliefs are widely misunderstood, two tasks seem to be of paramount importance. The first is to formulate a hypothesis as to how the Blessed Virgin may be said to appease or avert the anger of God within the subjective redemption; this undoubtedly includes revisiting the anthropopathism of God's "wrath" in relation to His impassibility, the Scriptural texts which describe holy men on earth as averting said wrath,¹⁹⁶ the New Testament texts which teach that Christ propitiates (ἱλάσκεται) God by the merits of His Passion¹⁹⁷ and delivers believers from divine wrath,¹⁹⁸ the distinction between the immediate intercession

¹⁹⁵ A text to which several Protestant writers have objected is from the third of three *preces in honorem B. Virginis Mariae a perpetuo succursu* which Pope Pius IX indulgenced in 1866: "For if you bring aid to me, nothing will be fearful to me: indeed, not from my faults, because you will obtain for me the pardon of them; nor from the devil, because you are more powerful than the entire host of hell; nor, lastly, from my very Judge, Christ Jesus, because by you entreating, if even one time, He is appeased" (*Acta Sanctae Sedis*, vol. 2 [Rome: Officina S.C. de Propaganda Fidei, 1867], 367: *Si enim mihi opem feres nihil mihi metuendum erit: non quidem a culpis meis, quia tu earum mihi veniam impetrabis; non a diabolo, quia universo inferorum agmine tu potentior es; non denique ab ipso meo Iudice Christo Iesu, quia is te vel semel rogante placatur*). Since it is by no means my intention to become entangled in popular Catholic-Protestant polemics, but rather to provide theologians with an instance of a text with which other Christians struggle, I here abstain from naming such Protestant writers.

¹⁹⁶ Ps 106.23; Ex 32.9–14; Num 11.1–2; 14.11–20; Deut 9.13–20; Job 42.7–10; cf. Gen 18.22–32; Jer 18.20; Ezek 22.30.

¹⁹⁷ Rom 3.25; Heb 2.17; 1 Jn 2.2; 4.10.

¹⁹⁸ Rom 5.9; 1 Thess 1.10; cf. Rom 8.1.

of Christ and the secondary intercession of Mary and the other saints,¹⁹⁹ etc. The second task, on the other hand, is to carefully examine the historical record to discover the exact roots of the motif in question, and to subsequently publish the findings in an appropriate scholarly forum.

In this present study, I shall forego the former task and instead pursue the latter. I shall accomplish this by briefly surveying patristic texts prior to the Council of Chalcedon (451), some of which have never before been rendered into English, which demonstrate that the common medieval motif of our Lady averting God's wrath ultimately has its origins in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. The first patristic writer whose testimony I shall adduce is the influential Origen, followed by seven other Fathers, namely, Ephrem the Syrian, Nectarius of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, Prudentius, Augustine, Valerian of Cimiez, and Rabbula of Edessa.²⁰⁰ As the historical data demonstrate, Christians initially believed that the other saints departed, and especially the holy martyrs, are capable of appeasing the Lord by their intercession. During the fifth century, which ushered in the development of a distinct cult of Mary, this belief began to be transferred to the Virgin in particular among some Eastern Christians.

Origen (ca. 185–254)

Since Origen is arguably the most important figure in the development of ante-Nicene Christianity, it is unsurprising that he is an early explicit proponent of the doctrine of the intercession of the saints. He frequently asserts throughout his works, whether preserved in the

¹⁹⁹ The seminal late scholastic treatment of this distinction is Robert Bellarmine, *De ecclesia triumphante* 1.17, in J. Fèvre, ed., *Ven. Cardinalis Roberti Bellarmini Politiani S.J. opera omnia*, vol. 3 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1870), 178–179. Francisco Suárez also discusses it on several occasions, e.g., *De oratione, devotione, et horis canonicis* 1.10, in C. Berton, ed., *R.P. Francisci Suarez e Societate Jesu opera omnia*, vol. 14 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1859), 39; *De incarnatione* 26.1, in vol. 18 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1860), 665–666; *De mysteriis vitae Christi* 23.3 (38.4), in vol. 19 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1860), 334.

²⁰⁰ Only passingly and in separate discussions of the individual patristic works have scholars acknowledged even a few of the passages from these Fathers as teaching that Mary or the other saints are able to avert God's wrath. Moreover, the relevance of most of the texts presented in this study seems to have not yet been explored by scholars, but was instead inadvertently discovered by myself. In any case, I am unaware of any previous attempt to make a connection between these diverse patristic passages, or to gather them together in one place. It is therefore possible that, unbeknownst to me, additional pertinent testimonies from before Chalcedon exist.

original Greek or in Latin translation, that the souls of departed believers continue to pray for the living. For example, in a homily on Jos 13, translated into Latin by Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345–411), he expressly states, “I thus believe that all those fathers who have fallen asleep before us fight with us, and assist us by their prayers.”²⁰¹ And in his commentary on the Song of Songs, also preserved for us by Rufinus, he similarly remarks, “But if all the saints who have departed this life, still having charity towards those who are in this world, are said to have care for their salvation, and to assist them by their prayers and intervention before God, it will not be unsuitable. For it is thus written in the books of the Maccabees: ‘This is Jeremiah, the prophet of God, who always prays for the people’ [2 Mac 15.14].”²⁰²

In addition to such passages which speak of the prayers of departed saints more generally, there are also two places where Origen seems to teach that the saints are even capable of appeasing or turning away the anger of the Lord. The first is from his famed treatise against the anti-Christian philosopher Celsus, which he composed in 248.²⁰³ In its final book, when speaking of “all His [God’s] friends—angels, souls, and spirits” (πάντας τοὺς ἐκείνου φίλους ἀγγέλους καὶ ψυχὰς καὶ πνεύματα), he asserts: “For they sense those who are worthy of God’s favor, and they not only become well-disposed to the worthy, but they also lend aid to those who wish to serve the God who is above all, *and they propitiate Him, and with them they pray to and supplicate Him.*”²⁰⁴ That by “angels,

²⁰¹ Origen, *Homiliae in Iesum Nave* 16.5, in A. Jaubert, ed., *Origène: Homélies sur Josué* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1960), 366–368: *Ego sic arbitror quod omnes illi, qui dormierunt ante nos patres, pugnent nobiscum et adiuvent nos orationibus suis*. See also idem, *Homiliae in Numeros* 26.6.2, in L. Doutreleau, ed., *Origène: Homélies sur les Nombres*, vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 258.

²⁰² Idem, *In Canticum Canticorum* 3.7.30, in L. Brésard et al., eds., *Origène: Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 564: *Sed et omnes sancti qui de hac vita discesserunt, habentes adhuc caritatem erga eos qui in hoc mundo sunt, si dicantur curam gerere salutis eorum et iuvare eos precibus atque interventu suo apud Deum, non erit inconueniens. Scriptum namque est Machabaeorum libris ita: Hic est Hieremias propheta Dei, qui semper orat pro populo.*

²⁰³ See P. Koetschau, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 1, *Die Schrift vom Martyrium; Buch I–IV gegen Celsus* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1899), xxii–xxiv.

²⁰⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.64, in M. Borret, ed., *Origène: Contre Celse*, vol. 4 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1969), 320, emphasis mine: *Συναίσθονται γὰρ τῶν ἀξίων τοῦ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐμενισμοῦ, καὶ οὐ μόνον καὶ αὐτοὶ εὐμενεῖς τοῖς*

souls, and spirits,” Origen means both angels and deceased saints, is manifest from a parallel text in *De oratione*, where he similarly says, “But not only does the High Priest pray with those who pray sincerely, but also the angels in heaven who rejoice more over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance [cf. Lk. 15.7, 10], and also the souls of the saints who have fallen asleep before us.”²⁰⁵ His statement that such beings, when praying to and supplicating God the Father with humans on earth, also ἐξευμενίζονται or “propitiate” Him, is tantamount to an assertion that they placate Him, since ἐξευμενίζω denotes the act of appeasing God or other deities so as to regain His or their favor.²⁰⁶ Accordingly, we possess in this passage what seems to be the earliest written record of a belief that the saints departed can mollify God on behalf of those on earth.

A second, even clearer text is able to be furnished from Origen’s commentary on Matthew’s Gospel, or, to be more precise, from the greater portion of it which has “survived in an anonymous Latin translation of the late fifth (or early sixth century).”²⁰⁷ When spiritually interpreting Christ’s words in Mt 24.1–2, Origen makes the following, peculiar remark: “The disciples and other saints, not only then, but also now . . . intercede before the sight of Christ and call upon Christ, so that He might not forsake the human race on account of their sins, but that His wondrous works might move Him more towards forgiveness than their iniquities do towards indignation.”²⁰⁸ Unlike in *Contra Celsum*, where

ἀξίους γίνονται ἀλλὰ καὶ συμπράττουσι τοῖς βουλομένοις τὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεὸν θεραπεύειν καὶ ἐξευμενίζονται καὶ συνεύχονται καὶ συναξιοῦσιν.

²⁰⁵ Idem, *De oratione* 11.1, in Koetschau, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 2, *Buch V–VIII gegen Celsus; Die Schrift vom Gebet* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1899), 321: Οὐ μόνος δὲ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς τοῖς γνησίως εὐχομένοις συνεύχεται ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἐν οὐρανῷ χαίροντες ἄγγελοι ἐπὶ ἐνὶ ἁμαρτωλῷ μετανοοῦντι ἢ ἐπὶ ἐνενήκοντα ἑννέα δικαίοις, οἳ οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχουσι μετανοίας, αἱ τε τῶν προκεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ψυχαί.

²⁰⁶ See the instances cited in H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, with a Revised Supplement*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 592.

²⁰⁷ J.A. McGuckin, “The Scholarly Works of Origen,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. J.A. McGuckin (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 30.

²⁰⁸ Origen, *Commentariorum series in Matthaeum* 30, in E. Klostermann, ed., *Origenes Werke*, vol. 11, *Origenes Matthäuserklärung II* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1933), 56: *Discipuli ceterique sancti, non solum tunc, sed etiam modo . . . ante conspectum Christi intercedunt et provocant Christum, ut ne deserat genus humanum propter peccata ipsorum, sed magis moveant eum ad indulgentiam opera eius miranda quam ad iracundiam iniquitates eorum.*

“the God who is above all,” viz., the Father, is propitiated, in this passage, the Son is the one whose anger is averted, namely when He is reminded of the *opera miranda* which He performed for sinners while on earth. Although our Lord’s *discipuli* are presented as the primary agents in preventing His indignation even now, Origen expressly allows *ceteri sancti* to perform the same function. Hence, while he nowhere speaks of the Virgin as interceding for sinners or turning away the divine wrath, such later developments do not seem to be contrary to, but rather congruous with, his sentiments.

Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–373)

Ephrem, the deacon and poet-theologian of Edessa, is undoubtedly the most significant figure of the entire Syriac patristic tradition, with all Syriac-speaking churches claiming theological descent from him. A theme which recurs throughout several of his genuine hymns is the belief that the resurrected saints will intervene on his behalf at the Last Judgment.²⁰⁹ Some of these texts speak of the glorified saints in general, such as his seventh hymn on paradise, where he states, “May all the sons of light implore for me there, that our Lord might grant them the gift of one soul.”²¹⁰ In other texts, however, he mentions the intercession of certain saints in particular. At the close of one of his hymns on Nisibis, for example, while speaking of three deceased bishops of the city, he remarks, “And I the sinner, who strove to be a pupil of the three: when they will see the Third One [Christ], that He has

²⁰⁹ The intercession of the saints not only at the Last Judgment, but also at present, is taught in some of the *Hymni de Abraham Qidunaia* and *Hymni de Iuliano Saba* ascribed to Ephrem. The eminent Benedictine orientalist E. Beck doubts whether they are genuine, but concedes that they must have been written either by one of Ephrem’s disciples, or by a disciple of one of his disciples; see Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen auf Abraham Kidunaya und Julianos Saba*, vol. 2 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1972), v–xv, esp. viii–x, xiv–xv. The Jesuit I. Ortiz de Urbina, Beck’s contemporary, is more willing to accept them as authentic, since in his opinion, *spernenda videntur dubia circa genuinitatem hymnorum*; see Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia syriaca*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1965), 68.

²¹⁰ Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymni de paradiso* 7.25, in Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1957), 31. See also *ibid.* 6.19, in Beck, 23.

closed the door of His wedding-chamber, may the three implore for me, that He might open His door to me a little!"²¹¹

Ephrem is likewise convinced that the saints, by praying for him on the Last Day, will appease the Lord's justice. While speaking of those saints whose relics were at Nisibis, he passingly but explicitly asserts, "For my advocates are good and bold, articulate and many, and in court they are able to calm the Plaintiff, and save the guilty one."²¹² That he does not refer this hope of being spared from condemnation to only some saints, but rather to them all, is evident from the close of another Nisibene hymn: "Blessed is he who is mindful of that hour, in which there will be trembling and quivering, in which the pains of wrath will strike at the wicked. May all the righteous ones implore for me in that moment!"²¹³ Although our Lady is not mentioned by name,²¹⁴ she is undoubtedly included among all the saints of whom Ephrem speaks, especially since he elsewhere extols her very loftily as the sinless Mother of God's Son.²¹⁵ Later developments in the Syriac tradition concerning the ability of the Virgin in particular to obtain the deliverance of sinners from God's wrath,

²¹¹ Idem, *Carmina Nisibena* 14.25, in Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena (Erster Teil)*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1961), 40.

²¹² Ibid. 43.10, in Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena (Zweiter Teil)*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1963), 42–43.

²¹³ Ibid. 49.17, in Beck, 68.

²¹⁴ There are a few Syriac texts attributed to Ephrem which teach that Mary in particular will also pray for believers. One is *Paraenesis ad poenitentiam* 34, in G.S. Assemani, ed., *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri opera omnia*, vol. 3 (Rome: Typographia Pontificia Vaticana, 1743), 487, where the author asks God to receive the worship of believers and to have mercy "by the prayer of Your Mother and all Your saints." Another is *Sedra de probis et iustis*, in T.J. Lamy, ed., *Sancti Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, vol. 3 (Mechelen: H. Dessain, 1889), 236; its author, when enumerating those saints from Scripture with whom he wishes to stand at the Resurrection, concludes his list with "Mary, the Mother of Christ, who bore the unblemished fruit: by her prayer may souls be guarded from injuries." However, such passages are of doubtful authenticity and still await adequate scholarly attention.

²¹⁵ For one of the best critical treatments of Ephrem's genuine Mariology, including his belief in Mary's divine maternity, perpetual virginity, role as the New Eve, and immunity from sin, see Ortiz de Urbina, "La Virgine nella teologia di S. Efrem," in *Orientalia Christiana analecta*, vol. 197, *Symposium syriacum 1972* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1974), 65–104. A brief summary of much of the same material may also be found in idem, *Patrologia syriaca*, 80–81.

as seen in the fifth-century liturgical hymns of Rabbula of Edessa, may therefore be rightly viewed as having some continuity with the great Syrian Doctor's teaching.

Nectarius of Constantinople (d. 397)

Nectarius served as the archbishop of Constantinople from 381 to 397, between the reigns of Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom. Despite having presided over the First Council of Constantinople (381), he, unlike his illustrious predecessor and successor, was not a prolific homilist or writer. In fact, only one Greek work survives from him, namely, a sermon on the feast of the martyr Theodore Tyro,²¹⁶ of which there unfortunately exists neither a critical edition nor an English translation. This obscure and oft-neglected text is relevant, however, to the matter of the saints appeasing the Lord by their prayers, since at the end of the sermon, Nectarius exhorts his congregation to thus invoke Theodore with him:

O glory of martyrs and adornment of saints, O gift of God indeed, O guard and most unbreakable champion of believers, may you not forget our destitution and low estate! But interceding for us forever, may you not grow weary, O all-wonderful one; neither may you look away while we are assailed every day by the spiritual Julian of our souls [viz., Satan], the enemy who both then and now is the author of evil, O all-honored one. For we have believed you to live even after death, as the Lord said: "He who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live" [Jn 11.25]. But you, not simply having believed, but also having died for Him, O martyr worthy of praise, live an ageless and unending life in God. Therefore, as if living in Christ, and more closely standing by Him, *by prayers make Him propitious to your servants*, so that having been rescued from calamities here through you, we might also attain good things there, by the grace and benevolence of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .²¹⁷

²¹⁶ See O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, vol. 3, *Das vierte Jahrhundert mit Ausschluss der Schriftsteller syrischer Zunge* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1923), 361.

²¹⁷ Nectarius of Constantinople, *Sermo de festo S. Theodori* 23, in J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus: series graeca* (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866) [henceforth *PG*], vol. 39, 1837–1840, emphasis mine: Ὁ μαρτύρων ἀγλαΐσμα καὶ ἁγίων ὠραῖσμος, ὃ Θεοῦ δῶρον ὡς ἀληθῶς, ὃ φύλαξ καὶ πρόμαχε πιστῶν ἀρῥαγέστατε, τῆς ἡμῶν μὴ ἐπιλάβῃ πτωχείας καὶ

In this text, Nectarius envisions Theodore as standing at Jesus' side to perpetually intercede for the faithful; this is similar to a remark made by Gregory of Nyssa in a sermon which he also delivered on Theodore's feast in the 380s, where he relates that Christians "present a petition to the martyr to intercede, invoking him as a bodyguard of God, as one who, when called upon, receives gifts and grants them whenever he wishes."²¹⁸ This passage is also the first in which a Father refers to believers as the δοῦλοι, i.e., "servants" or "slaves," of a particular saint, though similar language is soon after used by Paulinus of Nola (ca. 353/354–431) to describe the supplicants of the martyr Felix.²¹⁹ Most peculiar, however, is Nectarius' final petition, namely, "By prayers make Him propitious to your servants" (ἵλεων τοῦτον ταῖς λιταῖς τοῖς δούλοις σου ποιήσον). It follows from these words that it is Theodore's prayers

ταπεινώσεως! Ἄλλ' εἰσαεὶ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πρεσβεύων μὴ ἀποκάμης πανθαύμαστε· μηδὲ τῆς καθ' ἐκάστην ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν Ἰουλιανοῦ, τοῦ καὶ τότε καὶ νῦν ἀρχεκάκου ἐχθροῦ, πολεμουμένης παραβλέψη, παγγέραστε. Ζῆν γάρ σε καὶ μετὰ θάνατον πεπιστεύκαμεν, ὡς ὁ Κύριος ἔφησεν· Ὁ εἰς ἐμὲ, λέγων, πιστεύων, κἂν ἀποθάνῃ, ζήσεται. Αὐτὸς δὲ οὐχ ἁπλῶς πιστεύσας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ θανὼν, ἀξιούμνητε μάρτυς, ζῆς ἐν Θεῷ ζωὴν ἀγίῳ καὶ ἀτελεύτητον. Ὡς οὖν ἐν Χριστῷ ζῶν, καὶ αὐτῷ πλησιέστερον παριστάμενος, ἵλεων τοῦτον ταῖς λιταῖς τοῖς δούλοις σου ποιήσον, ὡς ἂν διὰ σοῦ τῶν ἐνθένδε ἀπαλλαγέντες ἀνιαρῶν, καὶ τῶν ἐκείθεν ἀγαθῶν ἐπιτύχωμεν, χάριτι καὶ φιλανθρωπία τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. . . .

²¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermo de S. Theodoro*, in G. Heil et al., eds., *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 10/1, *Gregorii Nysseni sermones, pars II* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 63–64: . . . τῷ μάρτυρι τὴν τοῦ πρεσβεύειν ἰκεσίαν προσάγουσιν, ὡς δορυφόρον τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντες, ὡς λαμβάνοντα τὰς δωρεὰς καὶ ταύτας παρέχοντα ὅταν ἐθέλῃ επικαλούμενος.

²¹⁹ See Paulinus of Nola, *Natalicia* 1.10–14, in F. Dolveck, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: series latina* [henceforth CCSL], vol. 21, *Paulini Nolani carmina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 293; *ibid.* 2.5–7, in Dolveck, 296. References to the faithful as the "servants" or "slaves" of the Virgin Mary begin to appear during the fifth and early sixth centuries, as evidenced by Rabbula of Edessa (see the quotation corresponding to footnote 83 below) and Romanus the Melodist, the latter of whom addresses Mary by saying: "Hail, the hope of your servants; hail, protection of the orthodox" (*Cantica* 13.13, in J. Grosdidier de Matons, ed., *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, vol. 2, *Nouveau Testament (IX–XX)* [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965], 146: Χαῖρε, ἡ ἐλπίς τῶν οἰκετῶν σου· χαῖρε, προστασία ὀρθοδόξων; cf. T. Koehler, "Servitude (saint esclavage)," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, vol. 14, *Sabbatini–System* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1990], 730).

which propitiate or placate Christ, which, in turn, results in believers being rescued from calamities through him. When one also considers that the phrase “make propitious” is often used to denote the appeasement of wrath,²²⁰ it seems likely that Nectarius here intends to convey that the martyr is able to accomplish the latter.

John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407)

The Jesuit patrologist and historian D. Pétau, when discussing the patristic evidence for the Catholic doctrine that the saints currently intercede for those on earth, notes that “Chrysostom frequently produced innumerable and clear testimonies of the same mediation of the saints.”²²¹ The famed archbishop of Constantinople, who composed more extant works and exercised more posthumous influence than any other individual Greek Father, speaks of the faithful being aided by the martyrs’ prayers (εὐχαί),²²² of the martyrs intervening before the King of heaven to obtain blessings for the living,²²³ of the martyrs and other saints being “partakers of prayers” (κοινωνοί τῶν εὐχῶν),²²⁴ and of even the emperor supplicating the saints “to be his patrons before God” (αὐτοῦ προστῆναι παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ).²²⁵ Chrysostom’s confidence in the postmortem intercession of the saints is most strongly expressed at the conclusion of

²²⁰ See the instances below from John Chrysostom, in footnotes 45 and 47.

²²¹ D. Pétau, *De incarnatione* 14.10, in J.B. Fournials, ed., *Dogmata theologica Dionysii Petavii e Societate Jesu*, vol. 7 (Paris: L. Vivès, 1867), 100: *Chrysostomus innumera, et praeclara ejusdem sanctorum μεσιτείας testimonia passim edidit*. During the late fourth and early fifth centuries, belief in the postmortem, pre-resurrection intercession of the saints (especially the martyrs) was nearly ubiquitous among both the Greeks and Latins, as evidenced by the works of Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzen, Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa, Rufinus of Aquileia, Asterius of Amasea, Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, Augustine, Paulinus of Nola, Prudentius, Gaudentius of Brescia, Maximus of Turin, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Leo the Great, etc. Pétau, 97–109 remains one of the best surveys of the patristic testimonies.

²²² John Chrysostom, *Homilia de S. Pelagia virgine et martyre* 4, in PG 50.584; idem, *Homilia in S. Ignatium martyrem* 5, in PG 50.596; idem, *Homiliae de Maccabeis* 2.2, in PG 50.626.

²²³ Idem, *Homilia in SS. Iuveninum et Maximum martyres* 3, in PG 50.576.

²²⁴ Idem, *Homilia de S. Meletio* 3, in PG 50.520; idem, *Homilia dicta postquam reliquiae martyrum* 3, in PG 63.472.

²²⁵ Idem, *Homiliae in epistulam secundam ad Corinthios* 26.5, in PG 61.582.

his homily on the feast of the martyrs Domnina, Bernice, and Prosdoce, which he delivered while a priest at Antioch in April 391:²²⁶

Perhaps much longing for these saints has come to pass in you; with this ardor, let us therefore prostrate ourselves before their relics, let us embrace their tombs. For even the tombs of the martyrs have much power, just as the bones of the martyrs have much strength. And not only on the day of this feast, but on other days also, let us frequent them, let us invoke them, let us ask them to become our patrons. For they have much boldness of speech, not only while alive, but also while deceased, and much more while deceased. For now they bear the marks of Christ; displaying these marks, they are able to persuade the King of anything.²²⁷

There are, moreover, two passages in John's works where he manifests a belief that the saints' mediation is even capable of averting the wrath of God. The first is found in his eighth oration against the Jews, which he delivered in September 387 at Antioch²²⁸ for the purpose of preventing Christians from associating with, and hence being potentially converted by, the Jews of that city.²²⁹ In it, he warns those afflicted by

²²⁶ As to this homily's dating, see G. Rauschen, *Jahrbücher der christlichen Kirche unter dem Kaiser Theodosius dem Grossen* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1897), 525.

²²⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilia de SS. Bernice et Prosdoce martyribus* 7, in *PG* 50.640: Τάχα πολλὸς ὑμῖν ἐγένετο πόθος τῶν ἁγίων ἐκείνων· μετὰ τοῦτου τοίνυν τοῦ πυρὸς προσπέσωμεν αὐτῶν τοῖς λειψάνοις· συμπλακῶμεν αὐτῶν ταῖς θήκαις· δύνανται γὰρ καὶ θῆκαι μαρτύρων πολλὴν ἔχειν δύναμιν, ὥσπερ οὖν καὶ τὰ ὁστᾶ τῶν μαρτύρων πολλὴν ἔχει τὴν ἰσχύν. Καὶ μὴ μόνον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἐορτῆς ταύτης, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ἐτέραις ἡμέραις προσεδρεύωμεν αὐταῖς, παρακαλῶμεν αὐτὰς, ἀξιῶμεν γενέσθαι προστάτιδας ἡμῶν· πολλὴν γὰρ ἔχουσι παρῥησίαν οὐχὶ ζῶσαι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τελευτήσασαι· καὶ πολλῶ μᾶλλον τελευτήσασαι. Νῦν γὰρ τὰ στίγματα φέρουσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ· τὰ δὲ στίγματα ἐπιδεικνύμεναι ταῦτα, πάντα δύνανται πείσαι τὸν βασιλέα.

²²⁸ See W. Pradels et al., "The Sequence and Dating of the Series of John Chrysostom's Eight Discourses *Adversus Iudaeos*," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 6/1 (2002): 106.

²²⁹ It should go without saying that the antisemitic sentiments expressed by Chrysostom, which arose in a specific historical context, are altogether repudiated by both myself and the modern Magisterium; see Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate* 4, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 58 (Rome: Typi Polyglotti Vaticani, 1966), 742–743.

illness to not run off to synagogues and seek cures from Jewish doctors, but instead to seek the assistance of the martyrs: “And so, whenever you perceive God punishing you, do not have recourse to His enemies, the Jews, lest you should provoke Him more, but to His friends, the martyrs, the saints, who are well-pleasing to Him and have much boldness of speech before Him.”²³⁰ The martyrs’ “boldness of speech” (παρρησία) of which Chrysostom speaks is a term frequently used by the Greek Fathers to denote the influence which the martyrs and other saints enjoy in God’s presence, and which they can employ to impetrate favors for those on earth.²³¹ It follows from the parallel structure of this text that the martyrs, using such παρρησία, are thereby able to put an end to the punishment of God; that is, if having recourse to His enemies provokes Him more, then having recourse to the holy martyrs, who are His well-pleasing and influential friends, must have the opposite effect, namely, of placating Him.

The second relevant text is from his *Homilia contra ludos et theatra*, which he delivered while the archbishop of Constantinople in July 399.²³² The occasion of the homily is a recent devastating storm and

²³⁰ John Chrysostom, *Orationes adversus Iudaeos* 8.7, in PG 48.937: Καὶ σὺ τοίνυν, ὅταν ἴδῃς τὸν Θεόν σε κολάζοντα, μὴ πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτοῦ καταφύγῃς τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, ἵνα μὴ μᾶλλον αὐτὸν παροξύνῃς, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τοὺς φίλους αὐτοῦ, τοὺς μάρτυρας, τοὺς ἁγίους, καὶ εὐηρεσθηκότας αὐτῷ καὶ πολλὴν ἔχοντας πρὸς αὐτὸν παρρησίαν.

²³¹ For instances in Chrysostom’s own writings, see some of the places mentioned above, to wit, *Homilia de S. Meletio* 3, in PG 50.520; *Homilia in SS. Iuveninum et Maximum martyres* 3, in PG 50.576; *Homilia de SS. Bernice et Prosdoce martyribus* 7, in PG 50.640. For salient examples in other Greek works from the late fourth and fifth centuries, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermo de S. Theodoro*, in G. Heil et al., eds., *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 10/1, *Gregorii Nysseni sermones, pars II* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 70–71; Asterius of Amasea, *Homiliae* 10.4, in C. Datema, ed., *Asterius of Amasea: Homilies I–XIV* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 137; Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* 8.15, in P. Cavinet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, eds., *Théodoret de Cyr: Histoire des moines de Syrie*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1977), 402–404; *ibid.* 18.4, in vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1979), 56; Ephraem Graecus, *Encomium in martyres*, in K.G. Phrantzoles, ed., *Ὅσιον Ἐργαίμ τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα*, vol. 7 (Thessalonica: To Perivoli tis Panagias, 1998), 181.

²³² See J. Pargoire, “Les homélies de saint Jean Chrysostome en juillet 399,” *Échos d’Orient* 3/3 (1900): 155–157; W. Mayer, “‘Les homélies de s. Jean Chrysostome en juillet 399’: A Second Look at Pargoire’s Sequence and the Chronology of the *Novae Homiliae* (CPG 4441),” *Byzantinoslavica* 60/2 (1999): 273–303, esp. 279–284, 286–287, 290, 296, 302.

flood which occurred after the city's inhabitants dared to attend theatres and hippodrome games on a feast day. Chrysostom interprets the former disaster to be an outpouring of God's wrath in retribution for the latter offense, saying, "How shall we be able to make God propitious from now on? How shall we reconcile with Him who is angry? Three days earlier, a deluge and rain fell down, sweeping away everything, snatching the food of laborers from their very mouth (so to speak), flattening crops as hair, but ruining all things by an abundance of water."²³³ However, John then subjoins the solution, stating that God's wrath was put to an end after the city had recourse to the patronage of the apostles: "There were litanies and petitions, and our entire city rushed like a torrent into the places of the apostles, and *we took as advocates holy Peter and blessed Andrew, the pair of the apostles, and Paul and Timothy*. After these things, *when the wrath was ended*, we, having both crossed the sea and dared the waves, rushed upon the princes, Peter the foundation of the faith and Paul the vessel of election, celebrating a spiritual festival."²³⁴ The import of this passage is clearly that it was the apostles, invoked as the city's "advocates" (συνηγόροι), who caused an end to God's wrath, in thanksgiving for which the people held a festival honoring Peter and Paul across the Bosphorus.²³⁵ Hence, although the Virgin Mary is nowhere

²³³ John Chrysostom, *Homilia contra ludos et theatra* 1, in PG 56.265: Πῶς δυνησόμεθα τὸν Θεὸν λοιπὸν ἴλεω ποιῆσαι; πῶς καταλλάξαι ὀργιζόμενον; Πρὸ τριῶν ἡμερῶν ἐπομβρία καὶ ὑετὸς κατεβρόγγυντο πάντα παρασύρων, ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ στόματος, ὡς εἰπεῖν, τὴν τράπεζαν τῶν γηπόνων ἀφαρπάζων, στάχνας κομῶντας κατακλίνων, τὰ ἄλλα ἅπαντα τῇ πλεονεξίᾳ τῆς ὑγρᾶς κατασκήνων οὐσίας.

²³⁴ Ibid., emphasis mine: Λιτανεῖαι καὶ ἱκετηρίαι, καὶ πᾶσα ἡμῶν ἡ πόλις ὥσπερ χεῖμαρρος ἐπὶ τοὺς τόπους τῶν ἀποστόλων ἔτρεχε, καὶ συνηγόρους ἐλαμβάνομεν τὸν ἅγιον Πέτρον καὶ τὸν μακάριον Ἀνδρέαν, τὴν ξυνωρίδα τῶν ἀποστόλων, Παῦλον καὶ Τιμόθεον. Μετ' ἐκεῖνα, τῆς ὀργῆς λυθείσης, καὶ πέλαγος περάσαντες, καὶ κυμάτων κατατολμήσαντες, ἐπὶ τοὺς κορυφαίους ἐτρέχομεν, τὸν Πέτρον τὴν κρηπίδα τῆς πίστεως, τὸν Παῦλον τὸ σκεῦος τῆς ἐκλογῆς, πανήγυριν ἐπιτελοῦντες πνευματικὴν.

²³⁵ It is worth noting that in *Homilia in martyres Aegyptios* 1, in PG 50.694–695, Chrysostom even asserts that the mere presence of the martyrs' relics can avert God's wrath: "But should the common Master be angry at us on account of the multitude of our sins, we shall be able, by bringing forth these bodies, to immediately make Him propitious to the city" (ἀλλὰ κἂν ὁ κοινὸς ἡμῶν ὀργίζεται Δεσπότης διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων, δυνησόμεθα ταῦτα προβαλλόμενοι τὰ σώματα, ταχέως αὐτὸν ἴλεω ποιῆσαι τῇ πόλει). He credits this to "their [the martyrs'] boldness of speech before God" (αὐτῶν τὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν παρρησίαν).

formally mentioned by Chrysostom as someone who can avert the anger of the Lord as an advocate, his predicating such a motif of other saints, i.e., martyrs and apostles, indicates that later developments within the Virgin's cult are *virtually* in agreement with his beliefs.²³⁶

²³⁶ Although rare, references to Mary's intercession are not altogether absent from texts composed at Constantinople during Chrysostom's lifetime. Gregory Nazianzen, in an oration which he delivered on the martyr Cyprian in 379, relates that when the still unconverted Cyprian attempted to seduce a Christian virgin named Justina, she reacted thusly: "Supplicating the Virgin Mary to aid a virgin in danger, she proposes to herself the remedy of fasting and sleeping on the ground" (*Orationes* 24.11, in J. Mossay and G. Lafontaine, eds., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 24–26* [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1981], 60: Τὴν Παρθένον Μαρίαν ἱκετεύουσα βοηθῆσαι παρθένω κινδυνευούσῃ, τὸ τῆς νηστείας καὶ χαμευνίας προβάλλεται φάρμακον). Moreover, Severian of Gabala, in a homily which he delivered at the Church of the Apostles in July 400, when an army of Arian Gothic *foederati* was threatening the city, tells his congregation: "A multitude of barbarians is there, a phalanx of angels is here. The angelic army, the choir of prophets, the power of apostles, and the intercessions of martyrs fight for the godly. Do not think that martyrs alone intercede for us; rather, angels also supplicate God in our tribulations We also have Mary, the holy Virgin and God-bearer, interceding for us. For if an everyday woman [viz., Deborah and Jael in Jgs 4] conquered, how much more does the Mother of Christ confound the enemies of the truth? We have our Lady, holy Mary the God-bearer; but there is also need of apostles. Let us say to Paul, just as they said then: 'Having passed over into Macedonia, help us' [Acts 16.9] And what I said before, I also say again: let us invoke Mary, the holy, glorious Virgin and God-bearer; let us invoke the holy and glorious apostles; let us invoke the holy martyrs" (*Homilia de legislatore* 6–7, in *PG* 56.407, 409–410: Ἐκεῖ βαρβάρων πλῆθος, ὧδε ἀγγέλων φάλαγξ. Τῶν εὐσεβῶν ὑπερμαχεῖ ἀγγελικὸς στρατός, προφητῶν χορός, ἀποστόλων δύναμις, μαρτύρων πρεσβεῖται. Μὴ νομίσης, ὅτι μάρτυρες μόνον πρεσβεύουσιν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄγγελοι ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ἱκετεύουσι τὸν Θεόν Ἐχομεν καὶ ἡμεῖς τὴν ἁγίαν Παρθένον καὶ Θεοτόκον Μαρίαν πρεσβεύουσαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. Εἰ γὰρ ἡ τυχοῦσα γυνὴ ἐνίκησε, πόσῳ μᾶλλον ἡ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μήτηρ καταισχύνει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῆς ἀληθείας; Ἐχομεν τὴν δέσποιναν ἡμῶν τὴν ἁγίαν Μαρίαν τὴν Θεοτόκον· ἀλλὰ χρεῖα καὶ ἀποστόλων. Εἴπωμεν Παύλῳ, καθὼς εἶπον οἱ τότε· Διαβὰς εἰς Μακεδονίαν βοήθησον ἡμῖν Καὶ ἤδη εἶπον, καὶ πάλιν λέγω· Παρακαλέσωμεν τὴν ἁγίαν ἐνδοξον Παρθένον καὶ Θεοτόκον Μαρίαν· παρακαλέσωμεν τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ ἐνδόξους ἀποστόλους· παρακαλέσωμεν τοὺς ἁγίους μάρτυρας). For this homily's dating, see R.E. Carter, "The Chronology of Twenty Homilies of Severian of Gabala," *Traditio* 55 (2000): 5–6, 17.

Prudentius (ca. 348–after 405)

The influential Latin Christian poet Prudentius is an anomaly among the Fathers, in that he was not an ordained cleric of the Church, but rather a lay bureaucrat of the Roman Empire. Around the year 400, he composed *Peristefanon*, a collection of fourteen hymns in honor of martyrs whose shrines he had visited in his native Spain and during a pilgrimage to Rome.²³⁷ These hymns record for us the popular beliefs of the Christian faithful surrounding the cult of the martyrs, and frequently refer to and invoke the martyrs' intercession and patronage for the living. Prudentius variously asserts that the martyrs are patrons whose supplicants always receive their requests,²³⁸ that they see and lend support to their devotees,²³⁹ that they pray for the pardon of our sins,²⁴⁰ that they are patrons by whose protection whole regions are supported,²⁴¹ that they hear all prayers and render those which they deem acceptable,²⁴² that they have power from Christ to grant what anyone asks,²⁴³ that they bestow gifts from heaven as kind patrons,²⁴⁴ that they guard and protect both the citizens and visitors of cities,²⁴⁵ etc.²⁴⁶ One of the most forceful passages concerning the martyrs' mediation, however, is found near the close of the fifth hymn, where Prudentius thus implores the martyr Vincent:

Be present now, and perceive the suppliant voices of petitioners, you effectual pleader of our guilt before the throne of the Father! . . . Have pity on our prayers, so that Christ, *appeased*, might incline a propitious ear, and not impute all offenses to His own [people]. If we duly venerate the solemn day by mouth and heart, if we are prostrated beneath the joy of your relics, descend to this

²³⁷ For further information concerning Prudentius' life and the dating of his poetry, see A.M. Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), esp. 6–31.

²³⁸ Prudentius, *Peristefanon* 1.10–23, in M.P. Cunningham, ed., *CCSL* 126, *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis carmina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1966), 251–252; *ibid.* 2.561–584, in Cunningham, 276–277.

²³⁹ *Ibid.* 3.211–215, in Cunningham, 285.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 4.189–192, in Cunningham, 293.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* 6.145–147, in Cunningham, 319.

²⁴² *Ibid.* 9.95–98, in Cunningham, 329.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* 11.175–182, in Cunningham, 376.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 13.105–106, in Cunningham, 385.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 14.1–6, in Cunningham, 386.

²⁴⁶ See also *ibid.* 10.1–15, in Cunningham, 330; *ibid.* 14.124–133, in Cunningham, 389.

place for a brief time, bearing Christ's favor, so that weighed-down senses might feel an alleviation of forgiveness.²⁴⁷

Prudentius here entreats Vincent to listen to and have pity upon the petitions of his supplicants, reminding him of his function as the one who pleads on behalf of sinners before the throne of God (*nostri reatus efficax orator ad thronum Patris*). This exceeds what he states in the fourth hymn, where he presents the eighteen martyrs of Saragossa as a "crowd" (*turba*) which "prays for pardon for our faults" (*lapsibus nostris veniam precatur*).²⁴⁸ In this instance, Prudentius employs forensic imagery, portraying Vincent as a lawyer who intervenes for believers'

²⁴⁷ Ibid. 5.545–548, 557–568, in Cunningham, 312–313, emphasis mine: *Adesto nunc et percipe / voces precantum supplices, / nostri reatus efficax / orator ad thronum Patris! . . . Miserere nostrarum precum, / placatus ut Christus suis / inclinet aurem prosperam / noxas nec omnes inputet. / Si rite sollemnem diem / veneramur ore et pectore, / si sub tuorum gaudio / vestigiorum sternimur, / paulisper huc inlabere / Christi favorem deferens, / sensus gravati ut sentiant / levamen indulgentiae.*

²⁴⁸ Ibid. 4.189–192, in Cunningham, 293. Several other Fathers contemporaneous with Prudentius similarly assert that the saints pray for the forgiveness of believers' sins, e.g., Ambrose, *De viduis* 9.55, in F. Gori, ed., *Tutte le opere di Sant'Ambrogio*, vol. 14/1, *Opere morali II/I: Verginità e vedovanza* (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1989), 292; Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio funebris in Meletium*, in G. Heil et al., eds., *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 9, *Gregorii Nysseni sermones, pars I* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 454; Jerome, *Epistulae* 39.7, in I. Hilberg, ed., *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* [henceforth CSEL], vol. 54, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi epistulae, pars I* (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1910), 308.

“guilt,” or more literally, “charge” (*reatus*), in the divine courtroom.²⁴⁹ As a result of such mediation, Prudentius hopes that Christ will not hold His people accountable for their offenses, but instead be “appeased” or “placated” (*placatus*). Vincent, in turn, will carry a token of Christ’s “forgiveness” (*indulgentia*) to the faithful, provided that they rightly celebrate his feast day. This passage, therefore, is a straightforward testimony for a belief in the ability of the martyrs to placate our Lord. As with the other works surveyed thus far, the fact that the Virgin Mary is not mentioned is of little consequence; if some Latin Christians who flourished at the turn of the fifth century held that other saints can appease God, then surely there is but an accidental novelty in later Christians asserting the same about the Mother of the Savior.

Augustine (354–430)

The most illustrious of all the Latin Fathers, Augustine never makes reference to the intercession of the Virgin Mary in any of his extant genuine works,²⁵⁰ though he very frequently teaches that the martyrs currently aid the faithful by their postmortem prayers. On only one occasion does he state that the martyrs “intercede” (*interpellant*) for humans on earth, namely in his sermon on Ps 86 (85 LXX): “Our Lord

²⁴⁹ Prudentius elsewhere expects that the martyr Romanus of Antioch will pray for him at the Last Judgment, and thereby rescue him from damnation: “This is the book in the heavenly records, preserving memorials of imperishable praise, to be recited one day by the everlasting Judge, who with equal balance will compare the weights of misdeeds and the abundances of rewards. I wish that I, among the flocks of goats to the left as I shall be, might be picked out from afar, and that by him [Romanus] praying, the most good King might say: ‘Romanus prays. Bring this goat over to Me; may he be a lamb to the right, dressed in wool’” (*Peristefanon* 10.1131–1140, in Cunningham, 369: *Hic in regestis est liber caelestibus / monumenta servans laudis indelebilis / relegendus olim sempiterno iudici, / libramine aequo qui malorum pondera / et praemiorum comparabit copias. / Vellem sinister inter haedorum greges / ut sum futurus, eminus dinoscerer / atque hoc precante diceret rex optimus: / “Romanus orat, transfer hunc haedum mihi; / sit dexter agnus, induatur vellere”*).

²⁵⁰ All of the works once attributed to Augustine which contain references to the Virgin’s intercession are in fact by later authors. For example, the *Sermo de assumptione sanctae Mariae*, which enjoyed widespread medieval popularity and is printed among Augustine’s *spuria* in *PL* 39.2129–2134, is actually a production of Ambrose Autpert, an eighth-century Frankish Benedictine; a critical edition of the sermon may be found in R. Weber, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis*, vol. 27B, *Ambrosii Autperti opera III* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 1027–1036.

Jesus Christ still intercedes for us; all the martyrs who are with Him intercede for us. Their intercessions do not pass away, except when our groaning will have passed away.”²⁵¹ In all of his other works, Augustine instead prefers to say that the martyrs “pray” (*orant*) for the living, and refers to their present suffrages as “prayers” (*orationes*). For example, when commenting on Jn 15.13, he states concerning the martyrs: “Indeed, therefore, we do not so commemorate them at that table as we do others who rest in peace, that we might also pray for them, but rather, that they might for us, so that we might cleave to their footsteps.”²⁵² And in his treatise on baptism against the Donatists, when speaking of the martyr Cyprian of Carthage, he says, “May he therefore by his prayers assist us, who labor in the mortality of this flesh as if in a dark cloud, so that by the Lord granting it, we might imitate his good qualities as far as we are able.”²⁵³

Other places where Augustine expressly speaks of the assistance afforded by the martyrs’ postmortem *orationes* may be greatly

²⁵¹ Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 85.24, in E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, eds., CCL 39, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini enarrationes in Psalmos LI–C* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956), 1196: *Dominus enim noster Iesus Christus adhuc interpellat pro nobis; omnes martyres qui cum illo sunt, interpellant pro nobis. Non transeunt interpellationes ipsorum, nisi cum transierit gemitus noster.*

²⁵² Idem, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 84.1, in R. Willems, ed., CCL 36, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini in Iohannis evangelium tractatus CXXIV* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 537: *Ideo quippe ad ipsam mensam non sic eos commemoramus, quemadmodum alios qui in pace requiescunt, ut etiam pro eis oremus, sed magis ut ipsi pro nobis, ut eorum vestigiis adhaereamus.*

²⁵³ Idem, *De baptismo contra Donatistas* 7.1.1, in M. Petschenig, ed., CSEL 51, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini scriptorum contra Donatistas pars I* (Vienna: F. Tempisky, 1908), 342: *Adiuvet itaque nos orationibus suis in istius carnis mortalitate tamquam in caliginosa nube laborantes, ut donante Domino bona eius quantum possumus imitemur.*

multiplied,²⁵⁴ but one in particular is pertinent to the concept that the saints can appease the Lord's anger. It is found in his *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, a commentary on the first seven books of the Old Testament which he composed around 419.²⁵⁵ When explaining the typological importance of God's commands to Moses concerning the curtains of the tabernacle's tent in Ex 26.7–14, he states, "He thereafter commands that those curtains be covered over with rams' skins dyed red. But a ram dyed red: to whom does Christ, bloodstained by the passion, not come to mind? Also signified by them are the holy martyrs, *by whose prayers God is propitiated for the sins of His people.*"²⁵⁶ Although this remark is made *obiter* and is not elaborated upon further by Augustine, it reveals a belief that the present prayers of the martyrs are somehow able to make satisfaction for the sins of Christians, and thereby propitiate God.

Valerian of Cimiez (d. ca. 460)

Valerian is a less conspicuous Latin Father who served as the bishop of Cemenelum (modern Cimiez) in the mid-fifth century, attended regional synods in southern Gaul during that period, and had likely been a member of the monastery at Lerinum (modern Lérins) prior to his

²⁵⁴ See idem, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 88.2.14, in Dekkers and Fraipont, 1244; idem, *De civitate Dei* 22.8, in B. Dombart and A. Kalb, eds., *CCSL* 48, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini de civitate Dei libri XI–XXII* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), 815–816, 821; idem, *Contra Faustum* 20.21, in J. Zycha, ed., *CSEL* 25/1, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini de utilitate credendi; de duabus animabus; contra Fortunatum; contra Adimantum; contra epistolam fundamenti; contra Faustum* (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1891), 562; idem, *Sermones* 159.1, in *PL* 38.868; *ibid.* 280.6, in *PL* 38.1283; *ibid.* 284.5, in *PL* 38.1291; *ibid.* 285.5, in *PL* 38.1295–1296; *ibid.* 297.3, in *PL* 38.1360; *ibid.* 312.1, in *PL* 38.1420; *ibid.* 316.5, in *PL* 38.1434; *ibid.* 319.6, in *PL* 38.1441–1442; *ibid.* 320, in *PL* 38.1442; *ibid.* 324, in *PL* 38.1447; *ibid.* 325.1, in *PL* 38.1447; idem, *Sermo de S. Ioanne Baptista* 2, in *PL* 46.996.

²⁵⁵ For this dating, see J. Fraipont and D. de Bruyne, eds., *CCSL* 33, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri VII; locutionum in Heptateuchum libri VII; de octo quaestionibus ex veteri testamento* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958), vii.

²⁵⁶ Augustine, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 2.108, in Fraipont and de Bruyne, 123: *Deinde iubet ea vela cooperiri pellibus arietinis rubricatis. Aries autem rubricatus cui non occurrat Christus passione cruentatus? Significantur his etiam martyres sancti, quorum orationibus propitiatur Deus peccatis populi sui.*

episcopacy.²⁵⁷ In 1612, the Jesuit J. Sirmond published twenty of Valerian's extant homilies,²⁵⁸ three of which regard the subject of martyrdom and were delivered on the feast of an unnamed local martyr. These are replete with testimonies concerning the cult of the martyrs which flourished in Gaul during Valerian's lifetime, frequently mentioning the veneration of their relics and confidence in their intercession before God. For example, in the third martyr-homily, he thus exhorts his congregation:

It is therefore proper, in the first place, that we should recommend ourselves to this patron by frequent offices, in order that he might watch for us as a peculiar intercessor before the Lord, and commend our life by the favor of his dignity. There is nothing that a man is unable to obtain, in whatever necessity he is placed, if he ceases not to supplicate the friends of the Highest Ruler.²⁵⁹

In the first homily on the martyr's feast, Valerian also posits that the martyrs are patrons who can mollify the anger of God. He begins the relevant pericope by telling the faithful, "Therefore, if anyone of you, most beloved, eagerly seeks the consolation of Christ, let him by almsgivings restrain the sorrows of strangers, and commend his own tears to this patron, in whose honor we meet."²⁶⁰ He proceeds to emphasize the importance of invoking the martyr, and rhetorically asks, with words which negatively assert what he later positively states in the third homily, "But what opportunity for pardon will there be before the righteous Judge, if you do not know how to supplicate the friends of the King?"²⁶¹ He

²⁵⁷ See Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, vol. 4, *Das fünfte Jahrhundert mit Einschluss der syrischen Literatur des vierten Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1924), 572–573.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 573.

²⁵⁹ Valerian of Cimiez, *Homiliae de bono martyrii* 3.3, in *PL* 52.744–745: *Oportet itaque, primo loco, ut nos huic patrono frequentibus insinuemus officiis; quatenus pro nobis apud Dominum peculiaris intercessor invigilet, et vitam nostram dignationis suae favore commendet. Nihil autem est quod non possit homo in qualibet necessitate positus obtinere, si amicis summi imperatoris non desinat supplicare.*

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 1.3, in *PL* 52.739: *Si quis itaque vestrum, dilectissimi, studiose Christi consolationem requirit, alienos dolores eleemosynis resecet, ac studiose lacrymas suas huic in cuius honore convenimus, patrono commendet.*

²⁶¹ Ibid.: *Quis autem apud iustum iudicem locus erit veniae, si amicis regis nescias supplicare?*

accordingly advises his congregation: “The suffrages of patrons are to be eagerly sought after indeed, *to whom alone it is given to know how to calm the mind and temper the indignation of the angered Lord.*”²⁶² Though no such belief regarding Mary’s patronage had yet to crop up in the West, where a distinct cult of the Virgin would begin to considerably flourish only in the early medieval monasteries, it is difficult to envision how one could impute blame to later Latin authors without also finding fault in those Fathers, such as Valerian, who speak similarly about the martyrs.

Rabbula of Edessa (d. ca. 436)

An ally of Cyril of Alexandria, Rabbula occupied the episcopal seat of Edessa from around 412 until 436,²⁶³ and was one of the fiercest opponents of the Nestorians in the Syriac-speaking church.²⁶⁴ Among his surviving works are several dozen supplications²⁶⁵ intended to serve as

²⁶² Ibid. 1.4, in PL 52.740, emphasis mine: *Studiose profecto expetenda sunt suffragia patronorum, quibus solis datum est irascentis Domini animos nosse mollire, et iracundiam temperare.*

²⁶³ For the dating of Rabbula’s episcopal election and death, see G.G. Blum, *Rabbula von Edessa: Der Christ, der Bischof, der Theologe* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1969), 7–8, 39.

²⁶⁴ For his role in the Nestorian controversy, see *ibid.*, 152–195.

²⁶⁵ These are printed in two separate non-critical editions from the nineteenth century, namely, J.J. Overbeck, ed., *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque opera selecta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1865), and Dominican Apostolic Missionaries of Mosul, eds., *Breviarium juxta ritum ecclesiae Antiochenae syrorum*, vol. 1, *Pars communis* (Mosul: Typi Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1886). The Dominicans’ edition is more complete than Overbeck’s, since the latter includes only three of the eight *ordines* of Rabbula’s hymns. When the same hymn appears in both editions, there is often some textual variation, although such variants do not alter the meaning of any of the hymns actually quoted in this present study.

liturgical hymns.²⁶⁶ Many of these, following the trajectory of earlier patristic works, mention or invoke the postmortem intercession of the martyrs and apostles.²⁶⁷ However, there are also several hymns which Rabbula composed in praise of Mary, whom he calls the “God-bearer” and “Mother of God.”²⁶⁸ These texts merit closer attention from Mariologists, since in them, Rabbula displays a robust devotion to the Virgin and belief in her maternal mediation.²⁶⁹ He frequently asks that

²⁶⁶ While a few orientalists and patrologists have expressed hesitancy concerning the authenticity of these hymns, such as Blum, 205–207, the only study devoted solely to the question has convincingly argued for the reliability of their ascription to Rabbula. See P. Bruns, “Bischof Rabbulas von Edessa—Dichter und Theologe,” in *Orientalia Christiana analecta*, vol. 256, *Symposium syriacum VII*, ed. R. Lavenant (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1998), 195–202, esp. his conclusion, 202: *Zusammenfassend läßt sich sagen: Die unter dem Namen des Rabbula von Edessa überlieferten Hymnen spiegeln in inhaltlich-theologischer Hinsicht, besonders im Hinblick auf die mariologischen und eucharistischen Partien, die typischen Kontroversen der dreißiger Jahre des 5. Jh. wider. Sie weisen zahlreiche Parallelen zu den übrigen Werken des edessenischen Bischofs, den Predigten, den Kanones und der Vita, auf, so daß die übervorsichtige Zurückhaltung mancher Forscher hinsichtlich der literarischen Echtheit ihre Berechtigung verliert.*

²⁶⁷ Rabbula of Edessa, *Supplicationes ordinis primi*, in Dominicans, 79, 80; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis secundi*, in Dominicans, 82, 84; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis tertii*, in Dominicans, 90; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 362–363; Dominicans, 94, 97–98; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quinti*, in Dominicans, 103; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis sexti*, in Dominicans, 105, 109; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis septimi*, in Overbeck, 370–371, 373; Dominicans, 111, 115; idem, *Supplicationes ordini octavi*, in Dominicans, 119, 122, 123. The Dominicans’ edition uses Eastern Arabic numerals for its pagination; I here provide the equivalent page numbers in Western Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) for the ease of the reader.

²⁶⁸ For places where such titles occur, see idem, *Supplicationes ordinis primi*, in Overbeck, 245; Dominicans, 77, 80; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis secundi*, in Dominicans, 84; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis tertii*, in Dominicans, 88, 90, 93; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 366; Dominicans, 97; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quinti*, in Dominicans, 98, 102; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis octavi*, in Dominicans, 117, 123.

²⁶⁹ Some orientalists have acknowledged the existence of Marian devotion within the *Supplicationes*, but to the best of my knowledge, the only contemporary study to explore this matter at any length, and which first brought these hymns to my attention, is C. Horn, “Ancient Syriac Sources on Mary’s Role as Intercessor,” in *Presbeia Theotokou: The Intercessory Role of Mary*

Mary might intercede for those who have recourse to her,²⁷⁰ such as when he remarks: “Virgin God-bearer, full of blessings, intercede and supplicate your Only-Begotten Son on behalf of us, namely, your servants, that He might rescue us all from all faults which we have committed, and also free us, that we might not do anything in which there is harm. Our Lady, do not look away.”²⁷¹ In another passage, he likewise beseeches her by saying, “Shelter us under the wings of your prayers, God-bearer, from all harm. You who are our refuge, and our great hope, and the pillar of us all: abate and extinguish the adversaries among us, who quarrel with us by means of our wrongdoing. Lead us towards your own blessed perfection.”²⁷²

Rabbula’s supplications are also exceedingly relevant to the more specific matter of whether the saints not only intercede for sinners, but are thereby even able to turn away the divine anger. Like several of the other Fathers already discussed in this study, he expressly holds that the martyrs can do so: “Peace be to you, blessed pillars, who support the earth that it might not collapse on account of the iniquity of its inhabitants. And behold, the holy Church and her children celebrate the day of your feasts. *By your prayers may the souls of us all be delivered*

across Times and Places in Byzantium (4th–9th Century), ed. L.M. Peltomaa et al. (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015), 171–175.

²⁷⁰ Rabbula of Edessa, *Supplicationes ordinis primi*, in Dominicans, 80; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis secundi*, in Dominicans, 82, 83, 84; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis tertii*, in Dominicans, 89–90, 93; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 362, 364; Dominicans, 93–94, 97; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quinti*, in Dominicans, 102–103, 104; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis sexti*, in Dominicans, 107–108, 108–109, 109–110; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis septimi*, in Overbeck, 370, 372–373; Dominicans, 111, 114–115; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis octavi*, in Dominicans, 117, 123.

²⁷¹ Idem, *Supplicationes ordinis tertii*, in Dominicans, 93. The phrase meaning “our Lady” may also be rendered as “our Mistress,” and connotes ownership over her supplicants. The regal dignity of Mary due to her divine maternity is even more clearly seen in one of the *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 366: “For in glory do you rule over all in creation, as you held the Creator in your womb.”

²⁷² Idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Dominicans, 97. It may be worthwhile for some Mariologist to tease out what relation, if any, these hymns (especially this text’s reference to the Virgin as “the pillar of us all” on account of her prayers) might have to the development of the doctrine of Mary’s universal mediation of grace.

from wrath.”²⁷³ Yet for the seemingly first time in extant patristic literature, Rabbula also asserts that Mary in particular can avert God’s wrath,²⁷⁴ such as when he says, “Who is able to speak about your conception, and about your child who was a marvel, pure and holy Virgin? The living fire dwelt in the womb of flesh, and by it it was not consumed. Intercede for us all, *that by your prayers and your petitions the souls of us all might be delivered from wrath.*”²⁷⁵ And in another Marian hymn, after a doxology to the Trinity, he similarly asks her, “And therefore, Virgin God-bearer, supplicate your Only-Begotten Son, *that the souls of us all might be delivered from wrath.*”²⁷⁶

These passages from Rabbula’s liturgical hymns are consequently indicative of a transitional period within Eastern Christianity with regard to the cult of the saints. The martyrs had been the focal point of this cult since the mid-fourth century, and it was naturally their intercession which Fathers such as Chrysostom, Prudentius, Augustine, and Valerian believed can propitiate, appease, or turn away the anger of the Lord. During the fifth century, however, especially in the wake of the Nestorian controversy, belief in the distinct mediation of the Mother of God began to develop alongside the preexisting emphasis upon the intercession of the martyrs. This resulted in Rabbula and other writers beginning to affirm that Mary, too, is able to avert God’s indignation. In the succeeding centuries, this conviction only intensified among Eastern Christians—as witnessed by Maximus the Confessor, Andrew of Crete, Germanus of Constantinople, Pseudo-Damascene, Ephraem Graecus,

²⁷³ Idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in *Dominicans*, 94, emphasis mine. The same hymn is printed with some textual variation in Overbeck, 363. For a similar text, see the immediately preceding hymn in Overbeck, 362–363.

²⁷⁴ Horn, 172–173, 175, passingly notes that some of the *Supplicationes* beseech Mary and other saints to obtain the deliverance of believers from God’s wrath, but she does not place much emphasis upon this.

²⁷⁵ Rabbula of Edessa, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 364, emphasis mine.

²⁷⁶ Idem, *Supplicationes ordinis octavi*, in *Dominicans*, 117, emphasis mine. See also idem, *Supplicationes ordinis quarti*, in Overbeck, 362; *Dominicans*, 93–94; idem, *Supplicationes ordinis sexti*, in *Dominicans*, 108–109.

Joseph the Hymnographer, etc.²⁷⁷—before becoming a dominant theme of medieval Latin piety as well.²⁷⁸

Conclusion

In this study, I have endeavored to briefly trace the ante-Chalcedonian origins of the concept that the Blessed Virgin is capable of appeasing or turning away the wrath of the Lord by her maternal prayers, which enjoyed far-reaching popularity in the medieval West. As the historical record demonstrates, the first Father to have seemingly adhered to a nascent form of this motif is the third-century theologian Origen, who posits that the angels and holy souls propitiate God the Father, and that the disciples and other saints currently intercede to prevent Jesus from forsaking mankind in His indignation towards sin. Ephrem the Syrian similarly hopes that all the saints will pray for him during the hour of wrath, and that the saints buried at Nisibis will calm the divine justice as his advocates. Once the cult of the martyrs became firmly established in the decades following Nicaea, such Fathers as Nectarius of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, Prudentius, Augustine, and Valerian of Cimiez propose that the holy martyrs in particular are able to propitiate, appease, or mollify God or Christ. Finally, in the fifth century, during which time a markedly distinct Marian cult began to emerge in the East, Rabbula of Edessa invokes not only the

²⁷⁷ See Maximus the Confessor, *Vita beatae Virginis* 130, in M.J. van Esbroeck, ed., *Maxime le Confesseur: Vie de la Vierge* (Louvain: Peeters, 1986), vol. 1, 170–171 [Georgian] and vol. 2, 116–117 [French transl.]; idem, *Epistulae* 1, in *PG* 91.392; Andrew of Crete, *Canon paracleticus ad sanctissimam Deiparam* 4, in E. Follieri, ed., *Un Theotocarion marciano del sec. XIV* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1961), 200; ibid. 8, in Follieri, 204–206; Germanus of Constantinople, *Oratio secunda in dormitionem sanctissimae Deiparae*, in *PG* 98.352; Pseudo-Damascene, *Sermo in annuntiationem Mariae*, in *PG* 96.660; Ephraem Graecus, *Precationes ad Dei matrem* 8, in K.G. Phrantzoles, ed., *Ὁσίου Ἐφραίμου τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα*, vol. 6 (Thessalonica: To Perivoli tis Panagias, 1995), 395; ibid. 11, in Phrantzoles, 413; Joseph the Hymnographer, *Triodion*, in *PG* 87.3844, 3884.

²⁷⁸ For a recent and outstanding English treatment of belief in the Virgin's intercession in the late patristic East and medieval West, see B.K. Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods*, vol. 1, *Doctrine and Devotion* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 168–245; the author provides an abundance of quotations from the historical sources and traces how several Byzantine Marian motifs, including the one currently under consideration, came to influence Latin-speaking circles.

martyrs, but also the Virgin Mary, to obtain the deliverance of Christians from wrath.

That only the last of these eight patristic authors expressly states that our Lady in particular can avert God's anger is of merely accidental significance. For the one seeking to demonstrate the reasonableness of medieval Marian piety, it is evident that if the prayers of the martyrs and other saints can placate the Lord or avert His anger, then surely it is only logical to deduce that the intercession of the Mother of God is able to do the same. Conversely, those who wish to criticize medieval piety, whether they be Catholic or Protestant, are faced with a daunting dilemma: if medieval Latin authors are to be accused of idolatry, superstition, or distrust in God's mercy for their beliefs concerning Mary, then Origen, Ephrem, Chrysostom, Augustine, etc. must be accused of similar charges with regard to the other saints.

It is my ardent desire that as a result of my findings, other Catholic theologians will develop an interest in this subject matter, and articulate a more precise hypothesis regarding how it may be rightly said that the Virgin and the other blessed in heaven can propitiate or appease God's anger by their prayers, especially in light of Jesus Christ's propitiatory intercession as the High Priest of the New Covenant, and His love and mercy towards sinners. I suspect that many theologians have recoiled from this question for fear that the motif under consideration is merely an example of medieval excess. It is perhaps time, however, to scrutinize older, outdated understandings of doctrinal development, since many of the motifs regarding Marian mediation that are typically associated with only the late patristic and medieval periods seemingly possess precedence in the cult of the saints from earlier centuries.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Another example is the popular medieval belief that Mary is *omnipotentia simplex*, i.e., that her maternal petitions infallibly obtain whatever she requests of her divine Son. This belief is often viewed as a novelty or excess which originated in eighth-century Byzantium, such as by von Balthasar, 287–288. However, a closer examination of the patristic record reveals that equally strong language had already been used of the martyrs' intercession during the late fourth and early fifth centuries; see John Chrysostom, *Homilia in SS. Iuveninum et Maximum martyres* 3, in PG 50.576; idem, *Homilia de SS. Bernice et Prosdoce martyribus* 7, in PG 50.640; Prudentius, *Peristefanon* 1.10–23, in Cunningham, 251–252; Ephrem the Syrian (dubious), *Hymni de sanctis martyribus* 18.1–4, in Lamy, 3.733–735.

Bérulle's Marian Way to Jesus: The Christocentric Praxis of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle's Marian États Revealed Through the Lens of Self-Gift

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I make to the Most Holy Virgin a whole, absolute and irrevocable oblation of all that I am by the mercy of God in being and in the order of nature and grace, of all that depends on it, of all natural, indifferent and good actions, which I will operate forever, referring everything, that is to say, everything that is in me and everything I can refer to the homage and honor of the Most Holy Virgin, which I take and now regard as the object to which, after her Son, and under her Son, I relate my soul and my life, both interior and exterior, and generally everything that is mine.²⁸⁰

Pierre de Bérulle (Vow of Servitude to Mary)

The above excerpt is from Pierre de Bérulle's vow of servitude to Mary that he propagated, along with a vow to Jesus, in France roughly from 1604, to the end of his life in 1629. This work is an examination of the anthropology and spirituality that surrounds these vows. The hope of the following examination is to draw out the Christocentricity of Bérulle's Marian devotion. The vows of servitude that he propagated and guided others through centralize the inseparability of his Christological vision and Marian piety. Bérulle's theology and spirituality were highlighted by emphases on the creaturely existence of humanity, mystically referred to as nothingness (*néant*), the human person's need to recognize their ultimate dependency on God, and human fulfillment found in the interior dispositions or states (*états*) of the Incarnation. The Bérullian vows in turn, following these presuppositions, were to serve in stirring grace in those who have allowed their faith to dissipate or lie dormant.

²⁸⁰ Pierre de Bérulle, and Jacques Paul Migne, *Œuvres complètes de Bérulle* (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1856), 630-31 (my translation).

1. Biography and Historical Context

Bérulle is primarily a figure in French church history, known for his founding of the first oratory in France and his political career as a statesman and cardinal, especially his polemic with Cardinal Richelieu.²⁸¹ His escort and supervision of the Discalced Carmelite migration to, and reform in, France is also well documented. His role in these crucial movements in France in the spiritual vacuum following Trent²⁸² allowed Bérulle to propagate his theology, along with the corresponding spirituality, through the appropriate channels respectively. He was able to promote a spirituality with a particular Christocentric and exemplarist fabric through his organizing and supervision of the Oratory and Carmelite communities in France. Thus, Bérulle's lasting impact on the spiritual life of France and beyond is worth investigating. Most of the research conducted on Bérulle and the subsequent Oratorian spirituality ("the French school" as famously named by Henri Bremond), has been primarily carried out in the French speaking areas of academia. There have been some advancements in this area by scholars outside of France,²⁸³ though these scholars appear to have not received much

²⁸¹ Cardinal Armand Jean du Plessis, Duke of Richelieu (1585-1642), was a French clergyman and statesman. He was consecrated as a bishop in 1607 and became a powerful figure in both Church and French politics. He was made cardinal in 1622 and King Louis XIII made him chief minister in 1624. His chief foreign policy aims were to check the power of the Austro-Spanish Habsburg dynasty and to ensure French dominance in the Thirty Years' War. Although he was a cardinal, he did not hesitate to make alliances with Protestant rulers to achieve his goals. These political aims put Richelieu at odds with Pope Urban VIII (1568-1644).

²⁸² The Council of Trent (1545-1563) required the creation of diocesan seminaries with the canon *Cum Adolescentium Aetas*. Many dioceses in France did not implement the canon and establish seminaries. This vacuum to a large degree was filled by Bérulle's establishment of the Oratory.

²⁸³ Some notable exceptions are Anne Minton, *The Figure of Christ in the Writings of Pierre De Bérulle, 1575-1629* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1983); William M. Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School. Selected Writings*, trans. Lowell M. Glendon (New York: Paulist, 1989); Charles E. Williams, *The French Oratorians and Absolutism, 1611-1641* (New York: P. Lang, 1989); Philip McCosker, "The Christology of Pierre de Bérulle," *The Downside Review*, vol. 124, no. 435, (2006); Edward Howells, "Relationality and Difference in the Mysticism of Pierre De Bérulle," *Harvard Theological Review* 102.02 (2009); Erik Varden, *Redeeming Freedom: The Principle of Servitude in Bérulle* (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 2011); and most recently, Clare McGrath-Merkle, *Bérulle's Spiritual Theology of Priesthood: A Study in Speculative*

recognition, especially on the topic of Bérulle and the French school. These scholars, along with French historical and systematic commentary, will assist here in examining Bérulle's Christology and intrinsically tied Mariology.

Bérulle was born on February 4, 1575 in Cerilly, France. It appears that from an early age Bérulle's spirituality would begin to take shape. His father, Claude de Bérulle, died when he was seven, and he was raised by a single mother, who moved the family to Paris in 1582. Pierre was the oldest of four children. According to historical accounts, Bérulle's mother, Louise Seguier, was an extremely austere woman as "she [while on her deathbed] refused, in the heat of her fever, the approach of her lips with a slice of lemon, calling this relief a sensuality."²⁸⁴ Bérulle's mother would before her death enter a Carmelite convent and come under her son's spiritual direction. This experience of his could have implanted in Bérulle a deep sense of motherhood, notably from a devout mother who would look to her son for spiritual direction. Possibly due to this upbringing, Bérulle has been depicted by some historians as displaying his piety from a very young age. Henri Bremond²⁸⁵ depicts the young Bérulle as "convicted and resolute," yet "with no trace of self-sufficiency, for he thought but little of himself."²⁸⁶

In 1597 Bérulle published his first work *Bref discours de l'abnégation intérieure* ('A Brief Discourse on Interior Self-Denial'). Notably this early work is characteristically lacking in Christocentricity. Nowhere in the work is mentioned the person of Christ. The work rather emphasizes the abandonment of the human person to God. The main obstacle to radical love of God is self-love, which for Bérulle, at this development of his thought, needs to be utterly negated in order to lose oneself in blissful

Mysticism and Applied Metaphysics, Ethik Und Philosophie 12, Münster: Studien Zur Systematischen Theologie, Aschendorff Verlag, 2018.

²⁸⁴ Michel Houssaye, *Le cardinal de Bérulle et le cardinal de Richelieu, 1625-1629* (Paris: Plon, 1874), 278 (my translation).

²⁸⁵ Henri Bremond (1865–1933) was a French literary scholar and sometime Jesuit (left the Society in 1904). Some have asserted that he was a modernist, considering his friendship with George Tyrrell. Bremond wrote his prolific eleven volume work, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours* (from 1916 to 1936), volume three introducing Bérulle back into academic discussion, depicting the latter as the epitome of devout humanism.

²⁸⁶ Henri Bremond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, trans., K. L. Montgomery, Vol. 3 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1928), 5.

self-forgetfulness. Bérulle later appears to have had his Christocentric conversion during an Ignatian retreat at Verdun in 1602 when discerning the fulfillment of his own particular calling, and whether to enter the religious life. Rather than entering the religious life, Bérulle intuited a call to something more fundamental: a Christocentric orientation by which all those with Holy Orders should orientate themselves in virtue of the unifying sacrament which constitutes their priestly office:

Here I could not ignore, but trying to persevere in some particular thought on the selection of some means rather than others, and particularly on the plan to enter into some religious order, and the motives that could carry me, I felt my mind hampered and darkened. I wanted to overcome this obstacle, and try a second time to go further, and then I had an inner warning that what God wanted from me for the time being was to offer myself to him and to dispose of whatever he pleased, and not to make a selection. Nevertheless, being applied to it again for the third time, I had another interior movement to resort rather to the Virgin Mary so that she might return me to the end and so to the means that her God and her Son give me, and that with some feeling of piety and devotion to her. Therefore, I begged her to dispose my mind to invoke in this affair the saint to whom she principally desired me to resort. I felt with confidence and devotion a movement and a desire to depend on her. Blessed be the Blessed Virgin in whose care I put myself entirely. Jesus Christ alone is the end and the means in the Cross and in the Eucharist. There we must bind to Him as to our end, to use Him as a means.²⁸⁷

Notably above, appearing to ground Bérulle's Christological centering is his orientation to Mary. Fundamentally during this conversion to a more Christocentric spirituality, Bérulle has recourse first to Mary, whom he has confidence with orientating him "to the end and so to the means that her God and her Son give..." In the context of being stripped of a possible religious pretentiousness, Mary simply orientates Bérulle to her Son. Thus, paradoxically in placing Bérulle most

²⁸⁷ Bérulle, *Œuvres*, 1290 (my translation).

fundamentally at the servitude of her Son above anyone else, Bérulle felt “with confidence and devotion a movement and a desire to depend on her...” Simply put, devotion to Mary places Bérulle’s sight on Jesus at its most fundamental level, and in turn, Bérulle recognizes the value of Mary within this Christocentric light. It is probable that this experience at Verdun influenced to some degree his appropriation of the vows of servitude to both Jesus and Mary.

Much of the Catholic reform in France following Trent was influenced by those that frequented the salon of Bérulle’s cousin, Madame Acarie (Barbara Avrillot, later “Marie de l’Incarnation”). Acarie lived for several years in Bérulle’s mansion after her husband had been exiled from France. Much of the abstract mysticism, which stressed the *via negativa* that influenced Bérulle early on was from his encounters at this salon. Those that met at the salon were Pierre de Coton S.J., Dom Beaucousin O. Cart., St. Vincent de Paul, Benoît de Canfeld, and St. Francis de Sales to name a few.²⁸⁸ Beaucousin and the Carthusians are believed to have been a channel for the translation and propagation of the Rheno-Flemish mystical school.²⁸⁹ As early as 1595, Beaucousin was influential on Bérulle as his spiritual director. It is highly possible that the more abstract mysticism of the northern mystics was transmitted to Bérulle through this connection.

Madame Acarie also influenced Bérulle’s 1603-04 personal escort of the Discalced Carmelites from Spain into France, after which by papal bull Bérulle became one of three co-superiors, partnered with André Duval, a lecturer at the Sorbonne, and Jacques Gallemant, a priest at Aumale, a commune in northwestern France. Bérulle held this position as superior until his death. Despite the Teresian constitutions not allowing males to be separate from females within the order, Henry IV refused to allow Spanish friars to enter France. Nonetheless Bérulle escorted seven nuns into France, including Anne of St. Bartholomew, Teresa of Avila’s nurse, and the latter’s right-hand, Ann of Jesus, whom John of Cross dedicates his *Spiritual Canticle*.²⁹⁰ The nuns arrived to find

²⁸⁸ Philip McCosker, “The Christology of Pierre de Bérulle,” *The Downside Review*, vol. 124, no. 435, (2006), 112.

²⁸⁹ Minton, *The Figure of Christ in the Writings of Pierre De Bérulle*, 469.

²⁹⁰ Anne of Jesus was the one to pressure John of the Cross into composing a commentary for his work, *Cántico Espiritual*. After coming to France, she would remain under Bérulle’s superiorship for three years before founding a convent in Brussels. Anne

Carmelite postulants awaiting them, trained by Madame Acarie and living their conventual life in her home.²⁹¹ In 1604, Carmel of the Incarnation was founded in Paris.²⁹² Bérulle's time as a visitor and spiritual guide of the Carmelites led to tensions between him and later Carmelite friars that entered France under Denys de la Mère de Dieu in 1609. In 1614, Pope Paul V appointed Bérulle as perpetual visitor over the Carmelites already under his care, despite the protest of the Carmelite friars. Much of the debate surrounded Bérulle's promotion of consecrating oneself to Jesus and Mary, accusing Bérulle of substituting the Carmelite charism with the new Oratorian spirituality. Ironically it appears that Bérulle discovered these vows of servitude on his way to Spain in 1604 to bring Teresian reform to France.²⁹³ He had exhorted both those of the Oratory and Carmelite communities to profess the vow of servitude to Mary in 1614, and to Jesus in 1615.

The ferocity of the polemic surrounding the vows of servitude and Bérulle's role as perpetual visitor to the Carmelite communities is best summed up in the *Morlaix affair* of 1623. Discalced Carmelite friars had established an unauthorized convent in Morlaix²⁹⁴ in 1612. In 1623, when Pope Urban VIII confirmed the superiorship of Bérulle and his colleagues,²⁹⁵ the Carmelite friars advised the nuns to disobey the Pope and their bishop, and thus were excommunicated by the dean of Nantes,

of Jesus brought the *Cántico* to France, while assisted by Bérulle. Considering that John of the Cross's essential work on nuptial theology was in the personal possession of Anne, and Bérulle spent a good amount of time with her in Spain and on the road (she was carrying the *Cántico* at this time to France), it is not a stretch to believe Bérulle was one of the first French persons to review this work. Also, considering that Bérulle's work, *Discours de l'état et des grandeurs des grandeurs de Jésus*, is composed in response to a polemic with Carmelite Friars, it is highly probable that he utilized the spirituality of the great Carmelite. The *Cántico* was first published in Paris in 1622, and was in French.

²⁹¹ Michael J. Buckley, "Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality: Three Figures," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 44.

²⁹² This convent was closed and razed during the French Revolution in 1797.

²⁹³ Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School*, 12.

²⁹⁴ Morlaix is a commune in the Finistère department of the region Brittany in northwestern France.

²⁹⁵ Notably, Paul V in 1620 confirmed Bérulle's appointment along with Gregory XV in 1621. See Raymond Deville, *The French School of Spirituality: An Introduction and Reader*, trans. Agnes Cunningham (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 42.

Étienne Louytre, twice in 1623 and 1625.²⁹⁶ The Bishop of Léon, René de Rieux refused to submit himself and denounced Louytre to the Assembly of Clergy meeting in Paris. The assembly sided with Rieux and passed its declaration on June 16, 1625. Rome was upset with the assembly's decision against Louytre, and Pope Urban VIII then sent a letter to all the French dioceses overturning the assembly's decision. Seeing that the Oratorians were receiving the upper hand with the papacy, which probably was perceived as undermining the prevailing Gallican spirit²⁹⁷, Bishop de l'Aubespine sought for "calls of abuse" ²⁹⁸ concerning all bulls in favor of the Oratorians, subjecting them to the power of the local bishops. The Oratorians though had been in the past loyal to the local bishops over them, and continued to be despite allegations. The vows even made their way to the faculties of Leuven and Douay, Leonardus Lessius²⁹⁹ himself being suspicious of the vows and later advising Bérulle to defend himself.³⁰⁰ This, and other polemics, led to Bérulle's apologetic defense in *Discours de l'état et des grandeurs de Jésus* ('Discourse on the State and Grandeurs of Jesus') in 1624. Despite this polemic with Carmelite friars, French historian Michel Houssaye presents Bérulle as receiving a favorable reputation with second generation Carmelite nuns, who referred to him as the "good Father" that "we owe, after God, all that we are."³⁰¹ During the vows dispute, the Carmelite Madeleine de Saint-Joseph defended Bérulle's propagation of the vows, as they were beneficial for her own spirituality.³⁰²

A much smoother path for Bérulle to promote his spirituality centered on the vows of servitude was through his establishment of the first French Oratory in 1611, The Oratory of Jesus. The purpose of the

²⁹⁶ Williams, *The French Oratorians and Absolutism*, 215-16.

²⁹⁷ Gallicanism was a political and theological movement in France advocating for the restriction of papal power.

²⁹⁸ Williams, *The French Oratorians and Absolutism*, 217.

²⁹⁹ Leonardus Lessius (1554-1623) was a Flemish Jesuit and moral theologian who taught on the Leuven faculty. He is known for his treatise *De iustitia et iure* ('On Justice and Rights'), published in 1605, which was a commentary on the *Secunda secundae* of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*.

³⁰⁰ Houssaye, *Le Père de Bérulle et L'Oratoire de Jésus 1611-1625* (Paris: Plon, 1874), 404-406.

³⁰¹ Houssaye, *Le cardinal de Bérulle et le cardinal de Richelieu*, 497 (my translation).

³⁰² See Lettre 3 in Madeleine de Saint-Joseph, *Lettres spirituelles*, ed. Pierre Serouet (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 17.

Oratory was for the reform of the clergy in the wake of Trent, considering the decrees on the new seminary system were not officially enacted in France until 1615. Bremond presents the Bérullian reform not as one of mere moral change, but rather emphasizing the priesthood in its “mystical” dimension.³⁰³ What was sought to be restored by Bérulle was the dignity of the priesthood through a renewed look on the state of such a vocation, which was essential to his theology and spirituality. Here the vows of servitude were not required, though they were heavily encouraged, as Bérulle believed that the dignity of the priesthood was necessarily tied with a sense of unity with Jesus.³⁰⁴

Despite Bérulle’s impact, today Adrien Bourdoise³⁰⁵ is typically attributed with establishing the first seminary infrastructure in France, after the Assembly of the Clergy published the decrees of the Council of Trent in 1615. Bourdoise’s advancements though were not so much in the areas of education (thus theology and spirituality), but rather in practical matters.³⁰⁶ Bérulle and his successors transmitted the theology and spirituality that contributed to the religious climate of France in the seventeenth century. Charles Williams points out in his work, *The French Oratorians and Absolutism, 1611-1641*, that the Oratorians were deployed all throughout France to meet the growing needs of the faithful: “Typically, a bishop would request that several Oratorians be sent to his diocese to assist in reforming the clergy and to conduct missions and catechism classes for the laity, and to deliver Lenten and Advent sermons.”³⁰⁷ Despite filling this modest need as pastors, the Oratory was becoming more and more affiliated with education, being tasked with establishing new colleges. The Bull *Sacrosanctae* of 1613 permitted the Oratory to open colleges. Colleges were established in Saumur, Beaune, Condom and elsewhere to meet the demands of the citizens. Under Bérulle’s successor, Charles de Condren, education passed from the Oratory to Jean-Jacques Olier and his Company of St. Sulpice, which was founded in 1647. St. Jean Eudes in 1643 founded the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, today known as the Eudists, which was tasked

³⁰³ Bremond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, 135-36.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

³⁰⁵ Adrien Bourdoise (1584-1655), was a French priest and the founder of the seminary Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet.

³⁰⁶ Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School*, 10.

³⁰⁷ Williams, *The French Oratorians and Absolutism*, 214.

primarily with missionary work. Due to his missionary activity, Eudes at times is depicted as more active and practical than Bérulle when it came to his pastoral approach. Though it is evident that Eudes did conduct more missions than any other Oratorian, Bérulle's activity with the Oratory, Carmelites and French monarch depicts a particularly active clerical life. Such responsibilities may have kept him from direct involvement in missionary endeavors. St. Vincent de Paul is comparable to Eudes in terms of missionary activity, and though he was under the spiritual direction of Bérulle, he never was an Oratorian. Bérulle's direction and influence over such a vast number of persons and institutions illustrates not only someone who was able to transmit his knowledge of theological affairs, but also someone with an active role as a superior, cardinal, spiritual director and pastor.

Bérulle collapsed and died on October 2, 1629 while celebrating mass. Pope Innocent X, at the request of one of Bérulle's successors at the Oratory, François Bourgoing, introduced the beatification process for Cardinal Bérulle in 1648. Despite forty five miracles being attributed to him, the process was halted apparently because Bérulle was found to have been put on the Jansenist's calendar, possibly alluding to a suspicion that Bérulle had Jansenist leanings (St. Francis de Sales is also found on the same calendar).³⁰⁸ Bremond asserted that Bérulle's influence culminates in the missionary activity of St. Louis de Montfort,³⁰⁹ whose influence later extended far and wide due to the latter's work, *True Devotion to Mary*. This example displays the reach of Bérullian reform.

2. Bérulle's Christocentric Balance of État

One of the key features of Bérulle's thought is his notion *état* (state), and the meaning given it. The *états* are 'states of being', for which Christ, in virtue of his divinity, are revealed by the acts of His earthly life, or the Incarnation as a whole. For Bérulle creaturely acts left to themselves are fleeting and signify little. The acts of Christ, on the other hand, are perpetual and extend out to others welcoming participation. Thus, the different acts and corresponding states of the Incarnation signify something of the inner life of God and subsequently are extended to the Christian to participate in according to their state of life. Whether it be the

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 93.

³⁰⁹ Bremond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, 1.

birth of Christ, His public ministry, or Passion, the Christian can participate in these events perpetuated in time, which in turn have an effect on the state of the Christian. At the same time, Bérulle's *états* are Christocentric and exemplarist: the Christian can participate and take on the life of Christ, to be another Christ, while the Christian also has a relation *to* Christ. This Christocentricity, relation to Christ, is preserved in Bérulle by his devotion to Mary, who is the model of one who has a unitive relation to Christ. This Marian unity in turn maintains and presupposes distinction yet Christoforms the disciple.

An important distinction investigated in relation to this notion of *état* is between the psychological and ontological. Are we to reduce the Second Person of the Trinity's identity to acts he takes *ad extra*? Yet, at the same time, God's very reason for the Incarnation, and the preluding creation, is for revealing and communicating the divine life. In the fifth volume of his work, *The Glory of the Lord*, Hans Urs von Balthasar has acknowledged Bérulle's Christocentricism founded on an interlacing of the psychological and ontological:

In the analogy of being the analogy of the finite and infinite subjects is permanently in force. And in the concrete order of the world, as the supreme miracle of divine grace, the God-Man Jesus Christ is like the bridge between infinite and finite, between absolute glory and absolute adoration, the mediator of the religious act. Ontologically and psychologically, He is the full reality of analogy...This precision is not just ontological, because it is expressed by Christ's own act of adoration; and yet it is not just functional either, for the particular act totally corresponds to the ontological situation of the God-Man. To express the unity of the two aspects Bérulle invents the idea of 'state' (*état*). This denotes the psychological and existential dimension of Jesus' ontological reality; constantly and precisely, His actions reveal His being.³¹⁰

Following the same line of reasoning here from Balthasar, two main anthropological dynamics can be extrapolated from Bérulle's notion of *état*. The first is action: the human person comes to a certain understanding of

³¹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar. "The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age." *The Glory of The Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. vol. 5 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 120-21.

the good through action and self-fulfillment. The second is self-knowledge or disclosure: the human person comes to a knowledge of self and reveals oneself to others through act. For Bérulle, one may say his notion of *état* enables him to expound on how when someone unites themselves to Christ's *état*, to Christ's life qualitatively, taking on Christ's disposition, then who someone is becomes clear. In other words, their calling is made clear and is made manageable through the dialogical and in relation through the *état* of the Incarnation. Considering Bérulle's first work, *Bref discours de l'abnégation intérieure*, and the dominant theme of self-renunciation, self-knowledge proceeds first from knowledge of God, and not the inverse. Vincent Vasey, in his 1985 article "Mary in the Doctrine of Bérulle on the Mysteries of Christ," depicts Bérulle reversing the prayer of Augustine found in the *Soliloquies*, "Lord that I may know myself and know you" (*Noverim me, noverim te*).³¹¹ Vasey continues, "Convinced that first of all one must look to God, he wanted to know each category of being by reflecting on God and God's perfections."³¹²

No better creature ever responded to this call as did Mary due to her relation to Christ as his mother. In virtue of his creation, the human person is always in relation to God. The creature is by virtue of God's sovereignty dependent continually:

Hence, the obligation to remain entirely dependent on God and to follow the penchant of nature by striving to go to God. All of these ideas lead inevitably to the establishment of religion as the duty arising from baptismal consecration. Such is the response to the disposition God has made and implanted in each one; this is the answer to the state or condition of being. It is the substance of the Incarnation which then functions *in actu secundo*; it is the state and condition of the Mother of God which accounts for her psychological response to the reality of her condition.³¹³

³¹¹ Augustine, *Soliloquia* II, 1: PL 32, 885, qt. Vincent R. Vasey, "Mary in the Doctrine of Berulle on the Mysteries of Christ," *Marian Studies*: vol. 36, no. 11, (1985), 73.

³¹² Vasey, "Mary in the Doctrine of Berulle," 73.

³¹³ Vasey, "Mary in the Doctrine of Berulle," 71.

In light of this Marian response to creaturely dependence, it should be noted that in relating Mary to other creatures, especially human beings, Bérulle appropriated quite heavily the hierarchical schema of Pseudo-Dionysius. Creatures of an inferior order are dependent upon the influence of higher creatures. Here, due to Mary's unique privilege in the life and mysteries of Christ, and cooperation in His redemptive work, Christians are obliged to invoke her in their difficulties. The extension which enlists and enables Mary in serving humanity's good is the Incarnation. Through Christ assuming human nature, an extension is made by which human persons can participate in the divine life. All the events of Christ's life, including his dispositions, become the qualitative center in time. For this reason, all the events of Christ's life are not dead and past, but are perpetuated in time. Christ's unique relation to Mary was fundamental in his life, and subsequently is fundamental in the life of the Christian.

Another way of defining the *état* of the Incarnation, or the various *états* of such, is proper interior orientation, either in actuality or potentiality. This interior-oriented, yet ontologically related, spirituality promoted by Bérulle is evident from *Grandeurs* in his defense of the vows of servitude as a renewal of baptismal vows. He was not inventing another sacrament, but rather was making available an extension and renewing of the promises made at baptism. These *états* are for all time offered to humanity to participate in. Henri de Lubac noticed this perpetuity of the *états* as first requiring a Marian birth of Jesus in the heart of the Christian:

Earlier Bérulle had commented on it with remarkable insight: 'The Son of God wants to be born in our hearts...The mystery of Jesus [must not be treated] as past events that are dull and lifeless, but as events that are alive and present... only by reproducing in ourselves the divine mystery par excellence, that is, by begetting the Son and breathing the Spirit; in this way the Christian is essentially Θεοτόκος and our Lord looks on us as a brother, even more, as a mother, whoever receives and practices his Word.'³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 66.

Here de Lubac is alluding to Matthew 12:46-49, whereby Mary is an exemplar for the Christian to imitate. De Lubac is referring to the tradition that attests to three births of Christ: first, Christ is eternally begotten by the Father, second, Christ is born of the Virgin Mary, and third, Christ is born in the heart of the Christian. As found in many devotions and consecrations throughout the Church's history, the emphasis of a particular private devotion or practice that involves a vow or commitment is in actuality an occasion for stirring grace dormant in the person. Notably the consecration propagated by de Montfort was also articulated as the renewing of one's baptismal vows, the very argument made by Bérulle in *Grandeurs*.³¹⁵

As an extension of the Incarnation, Bérulle explicitly expounded upon the *état* of the Virgin Mary, and not just implicitly by his devotion to her. The mediative nature of Mary highlights Bérulle's more participative spirituality. While Bérulle's mystical notion of God as unmediated to the human person is held, he spends a good amount of time on the Virgin Mary in his works:

"This consent thus given, thus reported and thus accepted by the eternal Father, by the power of the Most High, you are the mother of Jesus; you are the paradise of the second Adam; you are the animated temple of God incarnate; you are the ample dwelling of the incomprehensible! Great qualities, admirable powers, rare and singular effects! And yet things so great and so divine are the consequences and effects of something so low as the humble birth of Jesus on earth and in the manger. For if God were not born and born of the Virgin, this great state [*état*] and this rare quality of the Mother of God would not be in the world."³¹⁶

Here Mary is referred to as a "paradis du second Adam," and thus displaying her as an extension in creation to Jesus' humanity. It is highly likely that Bérulle had an image in mind of Eve in constructing this extension. This image of a paradise also equates to a specific Marian

³¹⁵ St. Louis de Montfort attended Little Saint-Sulpice in 1695. Jean-Jacques Olier was the founder of Saint-Sulpice, and was a disciple of Charles de Condren, Bérulle's successor at the Oratory.

³¹⁶ Bérulle, *Œuvres*, (GJ XI, X) 376 (my translation).

état, a “great state (*état*) and quality of the Mother of God...” which is a mediated way for the believer to approach Jesus:

And hence, the greatest state which is absolutely within the jurisdiction of the sovereignty and power of the incarnated Son of God, is and remains only through this humble birth; it is to know the state [*état*] and the quality of the Mother of God ... the grace attached and reserved to the quality of Mother of God, would not be existing in the treasures of the power of Jesus and in the accomplished order of his grace and glory, and the incarnate Word would be deprived of the highest point of his state, of the most beautiful jewel of his crown, and of the most eminent dignity which is his power.³¹⁷

As evident from this reflection on the *état* of Mary, within the written vow of servitude above, this vows-based spirituality caused Bérulle to include a vow to Mary, preceeding a vow to Jesus.

3. Between Néant and Image

An important ontological understanding of Bérulle's that needs to anchor any examination of his mystical notion of *état* is his understanding of the human person as *néant* (nothingness). God is the one that sustains all being, including the being of humanity, and in this sense the human person is a nothingness. This notion of nothingness in Bérulle is not meant to be demeaning, but rather is a form of realism. This realism is the psychological awareness that the human person, despite his dignity, is not God. Erik Varden³¹⁸ has rightly noticed two *néants* in Bérulle, whereby the “original *néant*” is one of contingency, and the second one of sin. This is clear from one of Bérulle's short devotional writings:

We ourselves have only a right to nothingness, to sin, to hell, that is to nothing in any way. For the first is the nothingness of being, which we have been drawn, and between which and us there is only a wall, and yet it is

³¹⁷ Ibid., (*Vœu à Marie*) 631 (my translation).

³¹⁸ Erik Varden (1974–) is Abbot of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey in Leicestershire. Norwegian by birth, he was, before entering religious life, a Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge. He has published several translations and scholarly monographs and is much in demand as a preacher, spiritual director and lecturer.

only mire, that is, that body formed of dust and earth, and that dust, mud and earth, drawn from nothingness. As for the soul, there is no distance between us and nothingness except the hand of the Creator who has drawn us by his power. Sin is a second nothingness worse than the first; nothingness of grace, nothingness opposed to God, nothingness resisting God, and hell is the consummation and establishment in this miserable nothingness, where the damned loses all the use of all the good which is in their natural being, and is irreparably established in the state and servitude of sin.³¹⁹

After the Fall, humanity entered into a double néant, though again the intrinsic value of humanity is not wiped out, but rather that a true existential crisis is at hand whereby the human person, by not recognizing the reality of their contingency, is separated from God in such a way that they are actually turning against themselves, and in that sense, becoming 'non-being'.

As noted above, knowledge of one's self is needed by the human person in order to have a proper disposition toward the Incarnation. Knowledge of who and what someone is is made possible in light of who and what they are created to be, the calling from which is found one's true fulfillment. This knowledge necessarily involves the recognition by the person of their creaturely poverty and the supreme dignity of their vocation. One's vocation defines their creation as *imago Dei*: the human person has the capacity to know and love God, and thus have union with Him which transcends their natural powers. Bérulle balances within this mystery the incomprehensibility of God and the extension made by God to humanity through the Incarnation. At one moment God is the source of all wonder, while at the same time this wonder is given proper attention through the Incarnation:

You are in this state and subsistence an abyss of wonders, a world of greatness, an excess of eminences, rarities, singularities; you are the center, the circle and

³¹⁹ Bérulle, *Œuvres*, (OP 132), 1166 (my translation).

the circumference of all the emanations of God out of yourself.³²⁰

At certain points Bérulle is lifted up into contemplation of the wonder that transcends his own finitude, as seen above, and at other times is humbled in recognition of his creaturehood. Nonetheless he appears in some texts to oscillate lyrically in recognition of the duality of *néant* and image:

For man is composed of completely different parts. He is a miracle on the one hand, and on the other hand a nothingness. He is celestial on the one hand and earthly on the other. He is spiritual on the one hand and bodily on the other. He is an angel, an animal, a nothingness, a miracle, a center, a world, a god, a nothingness surrounded by God, needing God, capable of God and filled with God if He wills.³²¹

The above excerpt is from Bérulle's *Opuscules de piété*, a collection of short devotional texts (opuscles), meditations and outlines for homilies written for the instruction of the Oratorians and others. This opuscle is probably the Bérullian text that receives the most attention of twentieth century scholarship. Within the wider context of his work, *Le mystère du surnaturel*, Henri de Lubac has picked up on this oscillation as depicted in Bérulle, as found in the same passage above:

Hence, in this creature apart, this "unstable ontological constitution" which makes it both larger and smaller than itself. Hence this sort of dislocation, this mysterious claudication, which is not only that of sin, but first and more radically that of a creature made of nothing, which strangely touches God. *Deo mente consimilis*. At the same time, indissolubly, "nothingness" and "image"; radically nil, and nevertheless substantially image. *Esse imaginem non es homini accidens, sed potius substantiale*. By its very creation, man is a "companion of slavery" with all nature; but at the same time, by his character of image - *in quantum is ad imaginem dei* - he

³²⁰ Bérulle, *Oeuvres* (GJ II, V), 164 (my translation).

³²¹ Bérulle, *Oeuvres* (OP 115), 1137 (my translation).

is “capable of blissful knowledge,” and he has received deep down, as Origen said, “the precept of liberty.” We understand the exclamations of Bérulle. His lyricism does not betray, he does not exaggerate the doctrine of the ancient theologians: “It is a nothingness, it is a miracle it is a God, it is a nothingness surrounding God, indigent of God, capable of God!”³²²

Bérulle’s depiction of the human person as *imago Dei* is the counterweight within his schema, and the dogma of creation more generally: though created out of nothing, the human person is capable of union with God. Bérulle will follow the humanist definition of humanity by referring to the human person as a “grand miracle.”³²³ At times he refers to the human person as a miracle insofar as human nature is an “abridgment of this universe in its structure and its composition,” distinguishable in dignity from the rest of creation due to rationality. The rest of creation is “perfect in its condition, and without expecting any other new degree that they lacked,” whereas with humanity “the nature of man was not created to remain in the bounds of nature.”³²⁴ Thus, human persons are bridges between the material and spiritual. At other times Bérulle tempers this elevation of humanity, rather “it [the human person] is an angel, it is an animal, it is a nothingness, it is a miracle ... it is a nothingness surrounded by God ...”³²⁵ This oscillation never does become a dialectic in Bérulle’s writing (in the Hegelian sense); he holds both in tension without explaining away to a synthesis (the tension holds). Despite the human person being created *ex nihilo*, a miracle takes place wherein which the creature, who is ultimately contingent, is able to be united to God to the extent of having God live in and through them. This deifying vivification is made possible through the extension made by the Incarnation.

³²² De Lubac, *Le mystère du surnaturel* (Paris: Aubier, 1965), 149 (my translation).

³²³ De Lubac, *Pic de la Mirandole : études et discussions* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1974), 130 (my translation).

For this oscillation within the Bérullian definition of the human person, between image and néant (which constitutes the ‘grand miracle’), see Jean Dagens’s *Pic de la Mirandole et Bérulle*, in *Pensée humaniste* (1950), 281-82.

³²⁴ Bérulle, *Œuvres*, (OP 132), 1166 (my translation).

³²⁵ Ibid. (OP 115), 1137 (my translation).

4. Unitive Dispossession

It is appropriate to conclude that Bérulle encountered John of the Cross's nuptial spirituality due to the former's assistance in bringing Carmelite personalism to France. Bérulle's development of the notion of dispossession takes its particular expression in a "state of dependence"³²⁶. This state (*état*) manifests most apparently through the vows of servitude. The vow begins with the wish "that there is no more of me in me."³²⁷ Bérulle states, in discourse two of *Grandeurs*, that he is explicitly basing this on Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." At this point in *Grandeurs*, Bérulle is expounding on how one ought to seek a state whereby Jesus has "possession" of them:

And as the Son of God, by the right of subsistence, is in possession of human nature which he has united to his person, so I want that by the special and particular right of power, Jesus deigns to come into possession of my spirit, of my state and my life, and that I am nothing but a bare capacity and a pure emptiness in myself, filled with emptiness, and not of me forever.³²⁸

Bérulle here is making the remarkable connection between giving "possession" of one's self through becoming "bare capacity." To dispossess of one's self requires a self-emptying, a handing over to the care of another, a dependence on the other, and in relation to Christ, a total handing over. Edward Howells has acknowledged this notion of dispossession in Bérulle as depicting the nuptial dimension:

Mutual dispossession brings the language of servitude and anéantissement together with the erotic language of mystical union from the medieval Song of Songs tradition. Bérulle used both in conversation with Christology, although he barely refers to the Song. Christ's servitude, as the divine Son in relation to humanity, derives from a Trinitarian relational mutuality,

³²⁶ Erik Varden, *Redeeming Freedom: The Principle of Servitude in Bérulle* (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 2011), 37.

³²⁷ Bérulle, *Oeuvres* (GJ II, 12), 181 (my translation).

³²⁸ Ibid. (my translation).

which Bérulle explores according to the logic of the sharing of possessions in a marriage. Instead of each possessing part of their total possessions individually over against what the other possesses, the two partners, transformed by mutual dispossession, possess all of them equally and together. When one applies this to personal identity or self-possession and not just to material possessions, one gets a paradoxical result. The partners give up all that they possess as separate identities and offer each other their nothingness apart from the other. They then possess themselves, as selves, only in the act of dispossession in favor of the other.³²⁹

The self-giving quality of dispossession paradoxically results in true self-possession, but only within the dynamic of giving one's self to another. It is through the giving of one's self that the true self is possessed and recognized. A similar order of operations takes place between self-giving and self-knowledge: Bérulle gives a theocentric priority, by which knowledge of self and possession of self precipitates principally from knowledge of God and unitive dispossession to Christ.

As stated above, Bérulle appears to have received this notion of dispossession from John of the Cross:

When there is union of love, the image of the Beloved is so sketched in the will, and drawn so intimately and vividly, that it is true to say that the Beloved lives in the lover and the lover in the Beloved. Love produces such likeness in this transformation of lovers that one can say each is the other and both are one. The reason is that in the union and transformation of love each gives possession of self to the other and each leaves and exchanges self for the other. Thus each one lives in the other and is the other and both are one in the transformation of love.³³⁰

³²⁹ Howells, "Relationality and Difference," 233.

³³⁰ John of the Cross, *The Complete Works of Saint John of The Cross: Spiritual Cantic & Poems*, ed. Edgar Allison Peers, vol. 2 (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1947), St. B 27.

Here John of the Cross is drawing a connection between unity-in-love and the dispossession of each person. It could be said that there is a perichoretic union through self-gift, whereby stressing dispossession, thus implying distinction, or unity-through-gift, is the image presented here. From handing over possession of one's self to Christ, paradoxically one might say, the human person then has possession of Christ to some degree. There is a mutual indwelling between the Christian and Jesus that necessitates a distinction. This unity by way of dispossession as seen in the latest Carmelite reform during Bérulle's time was seen as a way of transformation, "This marriage is incomparably greater than the spiritual betrothal, for it is a total transformation in the Beloved, in which each surrenders the entire possession of self to the other with a certain consummation of the union of love."³³¹

Bérulle went as far as to speak of mutual dispossession between Jesus and his disciples. This expression is most notably found in his explication of Jesus' relationship with the Virgin Mary. In *Vie de Jésus*, an intended sequel to *Grandeurs* which went unfinished at his death, Bérulle states:

We can say that, whether she has seen or she has not seen the person of the Word incarnated in her, this divine person possesses the Virgin, and the Virgin possesses this divine person incarnated in her, of a possession so rare, and so peculiar to it, that we have neither pen to write it, nor language to say it, nor heart to feel it, nor mind to understand it. It is too graceful for us to dare to think and reverence it. It is a possession so great and so perfect, it is a communication so powerful and so intimate, it is a power so high and so high in the very order of miraculous and peculiar grace... holds a rank so high in the divine operations, and carries a privilege so rare in the favors of the Incarnate Word, that there never was and never will be anything like it.³³²

This possession appears to be a deifying cause of the human person, as seen in the exemplar case of the Virgin Mary, as "a

³³¹ Ibid., St. B 22, par. 3.

³³² Bérulle, *Oeuvres* (*Vie de Jésus* 29, I), 500 (my translation).

possession so grand and perfect, it is a communication so powerful and intimate.” For Bérulle, the Virgin Mary also profoundly represents the one creature in which God handed himself over in the Incarnation.

5. Conclusion: Marian Receptivity and the Spirituality of État

As propagated by Bérulle, the vows of servitude manifest grace-filled dispossession to the fullest. The vows are Marian, and ultimately Christocentric. Following the Marian thread, and the notion of dispossession, Aaron Riches has synthesized and highlighted the core of Bérullian spirituality:

But the deeper question, from a Bérullian point of view, concerns the very concrete question of what practice of life corresponds to unbounded love, to the movement from the *néant* of *creatio ex nihilo* to the *autre néant* of becoming a pure *capax Dei* in Christ. The Bérullian answer is Mary: she is Queen of Heaven precisely because she is *ancilla Domini*, because she claims nothing for herself before the Lord. This central Marian dimension was given practical expression by Bérulle in the famous vows of perpetual servitude to Mary and to Jesus, which he imposed or recommended on all those who either sought or were canonically placed under his spiritual care... Internalizing the vow thus meant learning, like Mary, to desire ‘to have no self in our self’ in order to let ‘the spirit of Christ be the spirit of our ‘self’. In the vow, then as in the Marian *fiat*, the human self is actualized in a negation of self-sufficiency to receptivity... We consecrate ourselves to Mary, then, because the Logos dispossessed himself to be utterly dependent on her, taking flesh of her womb and learning the gestures of human love at her breast in order to complete his mission on Calvary. In this way the pattern of the Son’s kenosis, from the frailty of his human infancy to the brutal wounding of his Passion, is the most concrete icon of filial obedience and it reveals, in the most tangible way, *who* Jesus is. And this form of being, of dispossession and being submissive to the initiative of

an Other, Christ, according to Bérulle, gives us to ourselves ('nous-mêmes à nous-mêmes').³³³

Here the paradox of coming to Jesus through Mary, under the Christocentric lens of dispossession and self-gift, leads to an ultimate dynamism of human activity infused with grace, whereby through the giving of one's self they find themselves. This relational constitution of the human person finds its fulfillment in the person of Christ, who reveals Himself through giving of Himself, which becomes a model for humanity to follow. As noted above, the perfect alignment of interiority expressed in Bérullian spirituality can be seen in the Virgin Mary, who is presented as constantly in a state (*état*) of giving herself to Jesus, and thus participating in his Incarnation.

Through the state of gift, humanity enters the nuptial union between Christ and his Church. Thus, there is a unity-through-dispossession. Phillip McCosker³³⁴ has called this unity a "relational cord."³³⁵ Bérulle's relationship with the Carmelites also appears to have kept his reflection on the Trinity less abstract by primarily focusing on the Incarnation. The privation of subsistence, following the formula of the hypostatic union, in the humanity of Christ is an analogous lesson for the Christian to follow in becoming pure capacity for Christ to dwell in them. This capacity is maximal in the person of Mary, whose openness to the divine life bears and brings the person of Christ into this world.

The theological anthropology and Mariology examined in this work not only highlights that of Bérulle, but apparently the whole of Pope St. John Paul II's *New Evangelization*. Bremond considered St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort as "the last great Bérullian,"³³⁶ and de Montfort is whom John Paul II explicitly took his papal motto from, "*Totus tuus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt. Accipio te in me omnia. Praebe mihi cor tuum, Maria*" ('I belong entirely to you, and all that I have is yours. I take

³³³ Aaron Riches, "Christology and the Nihil: The Wisdom of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle and the Catholic Encounter with Modernity," *Christian Wisdom meets Modernity* (New York: T & T Clark, 2016), 170-71.

³³⁴ McCosker is Vice-Master of St Edmund's College, University of Cambridge, and Director of the Von Hügel Institute for Critical Catholic Inquiry. His Ph.D. thesis was on models of paradoxicality in mystical christologies at the Faculty of Divinity in Cambridge.

³³⁵ McCosker, "The Christology of Pierre de Bérulle," 115.

³³⁶ Bremond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, 1.

you for my all. O Mary, give me your heart')³³⁷. De Montfort's consecration to Mary was acquired by him during his time at Saint-Sulpice, the school founded by the notable Bérullian Jean-Jaques Olier.

Notably found throughout Henri de Lubac's works, he attributed the influential aphorism found in his work *Catholicisme*, "By revealing the Father and by being revealed by him, Christ completes the revelation of man to himself,"³³⁸ to the thought of Bérulle:

Precisely, if we inspect a little of the spiritual history of humanity, we see one thing: there is reciprocity between man and God; in revealing himself to man, God reveals man to himself. It is by revealing himself as being personal that he has made man understand the depth of what is a personal being. The personality of man has been truly acquired in his consciousness only through the judeo-Christian revelation, prepared by the Old Testament, but assured and deepened by the New. When St. Paul in the epistle to the Galatians says: 'when it has pleased God to reveal his son, in me', this formula 'in me' is very evocative. In revealing himself to man, God digs the interior of man to make him reveal himself to himself. This is a very traditional thought. We find it among the Fathers, among the great spiritual writers. It is a thought that has been magnificently expressed especially by Cardinal de Bérulle, and the entire Oratorian tradition has pondered a great deal on this theme of the revelation of man by the revelation of God.³³⁹

Notably this work quoted above, *La foi chrétienne: Essai sur la structure du symbole des apôtres* ('The Christian Faith: An Essay on the Structure of the Apostles Creed'), that was originally published by de Lubac in 1969, is almost identical to his earlier work *Catholicisme* in

³³⁷ Louis-Marie Grignion Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary* (Rockford: Tan, 1985), 266.

³³⁸ De Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the common destiny of man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 339.

³³⁹ De Lubac, *La foi chrétienne: Essai sur la structure du symbole des apôtres* (Paris: Cerf-Alpha, 2008), 503 (my translation).

1938. The author in both contexts refers to Gal 1:15-16: “to reveal his Son in me.” De Lubac also notably cites Bérulle regarding self-knowledge in *Le mystère du surnaturel*,³⁴⁰ and he later explicitly details Bérulle’s Christian humanism in his chapter “Jean Pic et Bérulle” of *Pic de la Mirandole : études et discussions*, published in 1974, which to some extent is principally defined by viewing the aphorism *Nosce te ipsum* (‘Know thyself’) as a precursor, though lacking in itself, to divine revelation. According to de Lubac, the opposite of this Christian humanism wherein which “God digs the interior of man to make him reveal himself to himself,” is the atheistic humanism as depicted in *Le drame de l’humanisme athée*, which calls for an emancipation of the human person from God, who is only a psychological projection of the self:

The inference is that, in order not to sacrifice love to ‘God’, we must sacrifice ‘God’ to love. In so doing, moreover we shall be accomplishing the secret purpose of religion. For, rightly understood, religion ‘ceremoniously unveils the hidden treasures of man’s nature; it is the avowal of his inmost thoughts, it is the public revelation of the secrets, the mysteries of his love’... His [Feuerbach’s] atheistic humanism thus took as its banner the old precept that the Fathers of the Church had taken over long before. To reveal to mankind its own essence in order to give it faith in itself—that was his sole aim. But in order to attain it he thought it necessary to overthrow the God of the Christian conscience.³⁴¹

Here the self-revelation of the human person that follows from God’s own self-revelation no longer follows the underlying Augustinian recognition *Deus interior intimo meo et superior summo meo* (‘God is more inward to me than my most inward and higher than my highest’), God being transcendent and immanent. Rather, according to atheistic humanism, God is a projection of the human person’s own self; thus,

³⁴⁰ See de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad, 1965), 214.

³⁴¹ De Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 32.

there is a need, according to this distortion, to emancipate one's self from the illusion that is God in order to take back what they have slavishly given to an illusive other. What follows is the abolition of any spirituality that would emphasize dependence on another, starting with God.

The Bérullian influence also has an uncanny resemblance to *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph twenty-two, which possibly was directly taken from de Lubac's *Catholicism*.³⁴² "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear." (*Gaudium et Spes* 22:1). De Lubac himself worked closely on Schema 13 of the text with John Paul II (at that time Karol Wojtyła):

Another Frenchman with whom I established a close friendship was the theologian Henri de Lubac S.J., whom I myself, years later, made a cardinal. The Council was a privileged period for becoming acquainted with bishops and theologians, above all in the individual commissions. When Schema 13 was being studied (later to become the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*), and I spoke on personalism, Father de Lubac came to me and said, encouragingly: 'Yes, yes, yes, that's the way forward,' and this meant a great deal to me, as I was still relatively young.³⁴³

Gaudium et Spes twenty-two and twenty-four were the most prominent texts for the entirety of John Paul II's pontificate. The traditional formula which served as the hermeneutical key for the entirety of John Paul II's pontificate, that knowledge of God leads necessarily to knowledge of one's self, also was a guiding principle in de Lubac's theological synthesis. Thus, the reach of Bérulle's influence extends to this very day, though at times subtle and a result of those that followed him. It is fitting that de Montfort's Mariology, influenced by the spiritual wake Bérulle left, probably was the largest impact the latter made on future generations.

³⁴² Riches, "Christology and the Nihil," 179.

³⁴³ John Paul II, *John Paul II: Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way* (New York: Warner, 2004), 165.

Mary's self-knowledge and gift of self in accordance with her Christic motherhood, bought for her by the blood of her Son, becomes then an exemplar for any Christian to emulate. It is the *état* of Mary that enables Christians to bear the Son of God in their hearts.