

Mary and the Authority of Women in the Church

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Women possess authority in the Catholic Church.¹ But if we think authority is synonymous with the holding of formal office, if it is merely a juridical, legal, and political status, then women may feel seriously left out! The task before us is to penetrate the true meaning of authority which, according to the Christian dispensation and the sacramental structure of the Church, has very little to do with such things. Let me repeat: women possess authority in the Catholic Church.

The authority of women is different from the authority exercised by the Catholic ordained priesthood. However, it is an authority complementary to the priesthood and it is an authority without which the sacramental life of the Church and redemption itself could not exist.

Authority is most usually understood according to a secular paradigm; authority as a quantifiable force, exercised visibly and publicly by persons who hold a special position or office. Thus, those who do not hold public office have no authority. Within the Church, since women are denied access to Church office it must be obvious to all that they, ipso facto, are without power. Feminist theologians, especially, believe that women in relation to the hierarchical priesthood are in a position of subjection because they are not permitted to share in this formal, visible office. Because men alone, so it seems, are in a ruling and teaching position, feminists are resentful that their destinies are bound to the directives of men.

However, the authority women exercise in the Church flows from the manner in which authority is exercised within the order of redemption itself. The crisis of ecclesial authority can only really be

¹ This article draws upon material and insights from my previously published books, *Sexuality and Authority in the Catholic Church* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1995) and *The Authority of Women in the Catholic Church* (Crisis Books, 1997).

resolved when Christians come to appreciate that real authority is not synonymous with power. The person who possesses authority is not simply or always the strong one within a group who then uses his strength to organize the group around his vision. We must refuse the idea that whoever holds office, whoever has the most strength of will, whoever has strength because of size or numbers is the one who therefore has authority or is deserving of respect.

The question needs to be asked, why should anyone obey God? In what way does God have authority that calls for obedience? If we were to take a poll on this question there would undoubtedly be several answers. For instance, perhaps God should be obeyed because He is almighty in the sense that He can wipe people out if they do not listen to Him or punish them for disobedience. In other words, God is obeyed precisely because He has raw power. Or perhaps God should be obeyed because He is the law-giver, and justice demands that if human beings transgress what He has decreed, punishment is in order. After all, God is the Supreme Being, superior to human beings in every way, and He therefore has the right to demand that we listen to Him.

Simply a look at the word "authority" itself will be helpful. The word "authority" comes from the Latin "*auctores*" meaning to be the author or creator of something. A person has authority precisely by giving life. If God has authority, it is because *He is life itself* and the creator of all life. When Christians recite the Nicene Creed, the first item of faith declared is, "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth." Yes, God is Almighty, but not in the sense of simply holding power over something in some arbitrary way. Rather, "creator of heaven and earth" defines the almighty character of God. He is truly almighty because He alone can create out of nothing and the fact that God is Creator is the essence of God's authority.

Obedience to God keeps humanity alive by keeping persons connected to their source of life. Simple fear can motivate obedience to God, but if God has given the gift of life, then obedience is easily

motivated by love. And, of course, this is the ideal. But not to obey God brings death. After all, real death, the death of Hell, is separation from God.

Authority is the power to give life, but equally important; it is entirely bound up with the rights and responsibilities that are connected to this power so that the life that has been brought forth may come to its proper fulfillment.

If authority is the power to give life and the responsibility to oversee the good for that life then it is not too hard to understand Christ's authority in relation to the Church. The first principle of Christ's authority is that it exists within a covenant. Authority is covenantal. Christ is in union with that to whom He exercises authority, namely, the Church. There is a love relation between Christ and that over which He has authority. And dare we say it, the Church fulfills and completes Jesus as Eph. 1: 23 teaches the Church: "which is his body, the fullness of him, who fills the universe in all its parts."

Authentic authority never exists unilaterally, but covenantally. And authority exists in a covenant between Christ and the Church. Together, in their nuptial unity of Head and Body, they beget new sons and daughters for God.

We need to cultivate a new, radical appreciation for the truth that redemption is accomplished by God actively partnering with persons! No greater instance exists of this partnering than the role the Blessed Virgin Mary plays in the drama of salvation. And so we need to examine just how Mary fulfills that covenant partnership—as she, in her relation with Christ is a true agent in the salvific mission action of her Son.

Mary, Source of the New Covenant

I cannot now remember whether she was naked or clothed. If she were naked, then it must have been the almost visible penumbra of her courtesy and

joy which produces in my memory the illusion of a great and shining train that followed her across the happy grass. If she were clothed, then the illusion of nakedness is doubtless due to the clarity with which her inmost spirit shone through the clothes. For clothes in that country are not a disguise: the spiritual body lives along each thread and turns them into living organs. A robe or a crown is there as much one of the wearer's features as a lip or an eye.

But I have forgotten. And only partly do I remember the unbearable beauty of her face.

“Is it? ... is it?” I whispered to my guide.

“Not at all,” said he. “It's someone ye'll never have heard of. Her name on earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golders Green.”

“She seems to be...well, a person of particular importance?”

“Aye. She is one of the great ones. Ye have heard that fame in this country and fame on Earth are two quite different things.” “And who are these gigantic people...look! They're like emeralds...who are dancing and throwing flowers before here?”

“Haven't ye read your Milton? A thousand liveried angels lackey her.”

“And who are all these young men and women on each side?”

“They are her sons and daughters.”²

This quote from C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* illustrates one of the most important aspects of authority—though if we base our idea of authority on notions of quantitative strength and power, publicly enshrined then indeed Sarah Smith could not be regarded as “a person of particular importance.” Indeed, while Sarah lived she

² C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Harper: San Francisco, 1946), 118-119.

appeared to be of no real consequence—living a small, apparently ordinary obscure life in someplace called “Golders Green.” However, according to spiritual truths, the ones that really matter, Sarah is “one of the great ones.”

She is described by Lewis as having many children—those that she birthed into life by her charity. By her own charity she caused all those who came into touch with her to love others more. She is described as having power to “awaken all the dead things of the universe into life.”

Sarah Smith exercised a true motherhood and exercised authority according to this role. Indeed, due to this woman’s splendor, the main character of the Lewis story at first mistakes Sarah Smith for Mary, the Mother of God. But Sarah Smith is not really like Mary simply because many show her reverence. Sarah is like Mary because they both in a most unassuming way lead people to the fullness of life.

If we don’t locate the essence of authority in this principle, then it is easy to conclude that Mary had little to no authority. And because authority is often primarily associated with official quantitative power over others, feminist theology does not have much use for Mary. She is either ignored altogether or perhaps rehabilitated as a symbol for liberation theology. In feminist theology Mary, simply by being a woman belongs to an oppressed class and thus is a voice for all the oppressed when in her Magnificat she announces the overthrow of unjust systems, as God will “depose the mighty from their thrones and raise the lowly to high places.” Mary loses respect among feminists because she is seen as a passive figure, following and not leading, who is ultimately defined according to her procreative powers. Mary has been honored throughout the ages because she is a mother, but motherhood is not held in high esteem these days. Mary’s motherhood ties her to the hidden and domestic realm where there is little power and status.

Authority, as we have already noted, is not simply the exercise of power. Authority is the possession of rights that a creator (or author) exercises so that his or her created work may be maintained and brought to its fulfillment. Saint Augustine affirmed this life-giving authority when he stated "Two parents have generated us for death, two parents have generated us for life."³ The parents of death are Adam and Eve. We are saved by a New Covenant that repairs, or one might even say, fulfills what was in the beginning. This New Covenant is created by the union and cooperation between the New Adam and the New Eve: Christ and Mary.

Christ is the head of a New Humanity because He is the New Adam whose death is the source of the Church. This is His authority because this is how Jesus is the source of life and redemption. But women also possess authority, as they are source of life in relation to Him in the completion of the New Covenant. The authority of women is based on what women have been specifically entrusted with, according to the meaning of their gender, for the world's salvation. Salvation could not have been accomplished without the contribution of Mary Mother of God. God's divine plan of salvation could not have been achieved without her.

Mary: Source of the Incarnation

St. Paul declares that interdependency exists between the sexes:

Yet, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man independent of woman. In the same way that woman was made from man, so man is born of woman; and all is from God (1 Cor. 11: 11-12).

"Man is born of woman." This is true even of the Son of God. Christ is dependent on the life-giving power of Mary. She made God physically present in human history so that salvation could be accomplished. Christ is from Mary because of her "yes," because of

³ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 22.10 (CCL 41.300).

her "fiat mihi." "Let it be done to me," declared Mary to the angel. Mary's "yes" is the beginning, not only of her motherhood, but of the New Creation. Redemption is begun with the "yes" of Mary. The Marian era of grace and mercy was often contrasted by the Fathers of the Church with the era of sin and death that Eve ushered in by her misuse of power. For the early Fathers Mary is the source of life, the font of the New Covenant. St. Justin Martyr wrote:

We know that [Christ] before all creatures, proceeded from the Father by His will and power ... and by means of the Virgin became man, that by what way the disobedience arising from the serpent had its beginning, by that way also it might have an undoing (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 100).⁴

Because Christ came "by means of the Virgin" the disobedience of the first woman is undone. Tertullian similarly states:

God recovered His image and likeness, which the devil had seized, by a rival operation. For into Eve, as yet a virgin, had crept the word which was the framer of death. Equally into a virgin was to be introduced the Word of God which was the builder up of that life; that what by one sex had gone into perdition, by the same sex might be brought back to salvation. Eve had believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel; the fault which the one committed by believing, the other by believing blotted out (*On the Flesh of Christ*, 17).⁵

Women hold the key to death and life. Tertullian seems to think it is entirely appropriate that if death came by a woman—this death

⁴ St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 100, trans. R.P.C. Hanson, World Christian Books, vol. 49 (New York: Associated Press, 1964), 60-1 (PG 6. 710).

⁵ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, 17, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), 536 (CSEL 69-70.233).

should be overcome by a woman. Womankind is not dismissed because in the beginning she brought death. Salvation is not brought by men having to suppress women and keep them in subjugation according to the pessimism of the ancient pagan worldview. Rather women are fully engaged, free moral agents—able to fulfill their God-given responsibilities for the faith. Tertullian appreciates quite clearly the redemptive power of the female sex.

St. Irenaeus provides one of the most famous passages on the salvific life-giving role of Mary.

But Eve was disobedient ... As she, having indeed Adam for a husband but as yet being a virgin ... becoming disobedient became the cause of death both for herself and for the whole human race, so also Mary, having the predestined man, yet being a Virgin, being obedient, became both to herself and to the whole human race the cause of salvation For, whereas the Lord, when born, was the first-begotten of the dead, and received into His bosom the primitive fathers, He regenerated them unto the Life of God. He Himself becoming the beginning of the living, since Adam became the beginning of the dying And so the knot of Eve's disobedience received its unloosing through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by incredulity, that Mary, a virgin, unloosed by faith (*Against Heresies*, 3,22,4).⁶

And, though the one had disobeyed God, yet the other was drawn to obey God; that of the virgin Eve the Virgin Mary might become the advocate. And, as by a virgin the human race had been bound by death, by a virgin it is saved, the balance being preserved, a virgin's disobedience by a virgin's obedience (*Against Heresies*, 5,19,1).⁷

⁶ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3,22,4, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 455 (PG 7,1, 958-9).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5,19,1.547 (PG 7,2.1175).

Both Christ and Mary are origins of life. Irenaeus states that Christ is "the beginning of the living" but this is only possible through the Virgin's obedience. The saint does go so far as to say that the human race is saved by this Virgin's obedience.

SS. Cyril of Jerusalem, Ephrem Syrus, and Epiphanius all likewise proclaim that Mary is the cause of new life in God.⁸ Mary as source of life in contrast to Eve is proclaimed by St. Jerome in almost the form of a slogan: "Death by Eve, life by Mary."⁹

Mary is not a passive instrument of God. Rather, she is instrumental. She is instrumental in the drama of salvation specifically according to her feminine life-giving powers. Eve was disobedient. Mary is obedient. This means that in their freedom Eve and Mary are real moral agents: they effect death or life for others by their personal choices. It is through the authority of Mary's obedience that God became man. The entire economy of salvation is bound up with this fact. In the beginning Eve is taken from the first Adam. In the New Beginning the Last Adam is taken from the New Eve. By this, St. Paul's teaching is affirmed: "In the same way that woman was made from man, so man is born of woman; and all is from God" (1 Cor. 11: 12).

Mary is God's true partner in redemption and is so precisely through her femininity. God re-created the world through a woman. In the beginning God's word "Let it be done" brought life into being. His divine "fiat" brought forth creation out of nothing. At the Annunciation Mary becomes the source of the New Creation. Now the "Let it be done" is not God's, but man's. More specifically it is woman's. Because the Incarnation is the beginning of a new humanity Mary is the New Eve, Mother of all the Living, in relation to Christ, the New Adam.

⁸ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 12, 15 (PG 33.742); St. Ephrem Syrus, *Opp. Syr.* ii; St. Epiphanius, *Haer.* 78, 18 (PG 42.730).

⁹ St. Jerome, *Letter 22 to Eustochiam* (CSEL 54.173).

Mary and the Mission of Christ

The motherhood of Mary is a redemptive responsibility. She was entrusted with bringing Christ into the world, but her maternity also means that she brings Christ's priesthood to its supreme fulfillment. The Mother of Christ helps lead her Son to the Cross. The ministerial priesthood is under the rule of women's responsibility for the faith as the sacramental order itself is realized through the Marian maternal principle.

Mary is an actual agent of salvation. She is not just a puppet for God who simply makes use of her female biology so that Christ may be present in history. Mary's motherhood means that she actually helps her Son accomplish His redemptive work. When Mary opened her womb to Christ she gave birth to Him on the Cross.

The maternal authority of Mary is clearly revealed at the wedding at Cana. Here Mary instigates the mission of her Son and leads Him to the Passion.

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had likewise been invited to the celebration. At a certain point the wine ran out and Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." Jesus replied, "Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come." His mother instructed those waiting on table, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2: 1-5).

This incident is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, Mary takes the initiative in the situation. Jesus says the lack of wine is her concern but she obviously thinks it is His concern too and expects that He will do something about it. But, of course, the wedding at Cana is not about simply the replenishment of an alcoholic beverage. Jesus' words "My hour has not yet come" are the key to the meaning

of this passage. In the Gospel of John "the hour" refers to Christ's crucifixion and His entrance into glory. Christ's words at Cana: "My hour has not yet come" connect His first miracle to His Passion. The performance of the miracle of changing water into wine will usher in "the Hour" which is precisely the reason Christ was conceived and born "of woman." The wedding at Cana shows that Mary is not only the "mother of Jesus," she is the mother of His mission. She is the principal human agent in the initiation of Christ to His public ministry. Mary officiates at Cana. Her officiation is directed at aiding her Son in the accomplishment of His work of redemption.

The quality and quantity of the wine produced by Christ demonstrates the messianic import of His first miracle. Mary knew the importance of Christ's first public act.¹⁰ She serves as the catalyst of Christ's salvific activity. Because she leads Christ to His Passion she therefore also leads Him towards His glory. She is not the cause of this glory in the sense that she gave Christ the power to perform the miracle. Christ is God and the power is His. But she acts as the origin of the miracle in the sense of being the facilitator of it in the same way that Mary exercises authority in the Incarnation. As Mary brought Christ into the world, here she causes Christ's glory to be manifested to the world. Thus she is the origin of the disciples' faith which comes as a result of the Cana miracle (Jn. 2:11).

Mary, the New Eve

Christ executed His first miracle because someone requested it. But this someone is not just anyone—it is His mother. It is precisely because Mary is Christ's mother, the source of His presence in the world that she has the authority to request a miracle that would lead her Son to His Passion. Mary possesses this authority because it is tied to her maternal role in the economy of salvation. As the Mother of God she has been entrusted with aiding Christ in His salvific work. She can send Christ to the Cross because she is the source of His

¹⁰André Feuillet, *Jesus and His Mother* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1984), 14.

priesthood and thus she has a maternal right to nourish its fulfillment. Indeed, Mary has not only the right, but the responsibility to do so.

When Mary leads Christ to the Cross, she undoes the knot of Eve's disobedience. Eve led Adam away from what it meant for him to be a man and to be the head. Eve brought Adam under the power of her own whim. She misused her feminine power which, as St. John Chrysostom in *Homily IX* stated, led Adam astray from the will of God.¹¹ The New Eve uses her authority to lead the Second Adam, not to do her will, but to accomplish the will of the Father who sent Him.

This is a key element of feminine authority. Feminine authority is meant to lead men to fulfill what it means for them to be masculine and to fulfill the specific tasks and responsibilities with which they are entrusted in the order of creation and redemption. At Cana Christ subjects Himself to Mary in the accomplishment of His Father's business. Or perhaps we should say that Christ through the mediation of Mary's maternal authority, discerned and then subjected Himself to the will of the Father. She is the New Eve, the true and effective helpmate of the New Adam.

As the New Eve Mary is the co-redemptrix. Her role as such is revealed by Christ at Cana when He addresses His mother by the word "woman." This woman of Cana is the woman of Calvary where Mary accomplished by her maternal authority the covenantal role of the New Eve whose work, united to the sacrifice of her Son, serves as the origin of mankind's regeneration.

Mary fulfills the promise of the Protogospel. The Protogospel is a verse found in Genesis, chapter three. God confronts the first couple

¹¹ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily IX*, trans. Philip Schaff. "Homilies on Timothy," *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 13, ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, MI., Wm. B. Eerdmans), 1962, 435 (PG 62.544).

with their sin of disobedience and then turns to the serpent with these words:

I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head while you strike at his heel (Gn. 3: 15).

The passage describes a serious struggle involving the woman, her offspring and the Evil One. The triumph will ultimately be won by the woman's child. St. Justin Martyr identifies the Offspring as Christ who came through the New Eve whose life-giving obedience he contrasts with the death-giving disobedience of the old Eve.¹² Eve, not Adam is at the center of the struggle whereby the world's redemption is won. Yes, Eve, was seduced by Satan. Nevertheless, she is most directly involved in undoing the Fall and this undoing is possible through her because of her life-giving maternal position. Because the Offspring is Christ, Mary is at the center of the redemptive struggle as she fulfills the prophecy of the Protogospel.

The essence of woman is to have authority over the divine gift of life. Because of this, Mary is the source of the New Covenant. The Protogospel tells us that this is the meaning of woman. Because the woman as "mother of all the living" was indispensable to the beginning of creation, so too is she indispensable as the source of the New Beginning. John Paul II states this clearly in his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

It is significant that the foretelling of the Redeemer contained in these words refers to "the woman." She is assigned the first place in the Proto-evangelium as the progenitrix of him who will be the redeemer of man ... Mary is the witness to the new "beginning" and the "new creation" ... since she herself as the first of the redeemed in salvation history, is a "new

¹² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 100.

creation": she is "full of grace." It is difficult to grasp why the words of the Protoevangelium place such strong emphasis on the "woman," if it is not admitted that in her the new and definitive covenant of God with humanity has its beginning, the covenant in the redeeming blood of Christ. The covenant begins with a woman, the "woman" of the annunciation of Nazareth.¹³

With the sin of Adam and Eve death came into the world yet the Fall of Man did not obliterate the fact that woman is still the center of life. The Savior will come from a woman. The Fall could not obliterate her life-giving powers. Indeed, the maternity of Eve constitutes the vital factor in salvation history. From the beginning the woman is identified with her power: she is "mother of all the living" (Gn. 3:20).

Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Ratzinger, had noted that, even after the Fall, woman preserves the mystery of life, the power that is opposed to death. Even though Eve brought death, she is nonetheless the keeper of the seal of life.¹⁴ St. Paul teaches that the turning point in all history is bound to a woman. "But when the fulness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The feminine authority of the first woman is definitively fulfilled by the Virgin Mary from whom comes the long awaited Messiah. Eve's words of triumph literally apply to Mary. She can say "I have produced the God-man with the help of the Lord" (Gn. 4:1).

Mary and the Cross of Christ

¹³ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, (Art. 11) *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1988), 41-42.

¹⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, trans. J. Michael McDermott, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 17.

The woman of the Proto-gospel is the Woman who will stand at the foot of the Cross on Golgotha and be a true "mother of all the living" through the sacrificial offering she makes as the Second Eve. The suffering of the Woman is an essential part of the work of salvation: "In pain shall you bring forth children" (Gn. 3:16). These words apply not only to Eve but also to the New Eve who became the Mother of the Church and of all Christians.

At Cana, Mary is entrusted with the task of ushering her Son to His Hour. But the Hour is also hers. The pain of Gn. 3:16 that belongs to the woman is scripturally linked to the pain of the Cross. In the farewell discourse of John's gospel Jesus states:

When a woman is in labor she is sad that her hour has come. When she has borne her child, she no longer remembers her pain for joy that a man has been born into the world (Jn. 16: 21).

Salvation's drama is linked to the work of the Woman. The Woman who instigates Christ's first miracle is the same Woman present at the Hour of His death. Unfortunately many bibles translate Christ's words to His mother "How does this concern of yours involve me? My Hour has not yet come." Such a translation seems to indicate that Jesus places a separation between her seemingly minor concern and His salvific mission. However the original Greek text literally reads "What is this to me and to you, woman? My hour has not yet come" Here we see that Jesus, rather than treating Mary as an outsider or someone removed from His Hour, actually includes her in it. The Hour is not just the Hour of the Son. It is theirs. Mary is a partner with Christ in His work of redemption.

The feminine life-giving power permeates salvation history, bringing it about from the very Beginning. When Christ describes His death in terms of a woman engaged in the painful labor of childbirth the Proto-gospel is placed at the center of His Passion. Here on Calvary the Woman gives birth to the Offspring that will crush the head of Satan. Thus the Hour of Cana is the Woman's Hour as well as

Christ's. Mary's "fiat" has brought herself and her Son to the Cross. Both of them have accepted the meaning of the Incarnation. It is at the Cross that Mary's maternity is ultimately fulfilled. There she becomes the Mother of all those reborn through the blood of the New Adam.

According to Gn. 3:15, the Adversary of the Offspring, the Evil One, is also the enemy of the Woman. Therefore the Mother of the Offspring is not only present at the Cross but she actually contributes to the victory over the Evil One. For this reason Mary is established for all eternity as Mother of all the Living. On Calvary the personages of the messianic drama meet each other for the final action. At Calvary Mary is again addressed by Christ as "Woman." Her womanhood is entirely connected to what it means for her to be the universal Mother of the disciples.

Near the cross of Christ there stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdelene. Seeing his mother there with the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, there is your son." In turn he said to the disciple, "There is your mother." From that hour onward, the disciple took her into his care (Jn. 19: 25-27).

At the Cross Mary's universal motherhood is fulfilled. She is not only the mother of Christ; she is the mother of the faithful whom John, the beloved disciple represents. Christ exercises His headship supremely from the Cross because it is from there that the Lord becomes source of a New People. The New Eve stands in direct relation to the headship of Christ, whom as the Proto-gospel indicates and the New Testament witness affirms, is the covenantal partner in the Order of Redemption. Because Christ is from her, the Body of Christ, the Church, is derivatively from her. Furthermore, the Bride of Christ, the Church, is made in the Marian image as the Church is the essence of feminine response to the creative action of God. Pope Pius X states:

Wherefore in the same holy bosom of His most chaste Mother, Christ took to Himself flesh and united to Himself the spiritual body formed by those who were to believe in Him. Hence Mary, carrying the Savior within her, may be said to have carried all those whose life was contained in the Savior.

Therefore all who are united to Christ, and as the Apostle says, are members of His body, of his flesh, and of his bones, have issued forth from the womb of Mary like a body united to its head.¹⁵

Because Mary is the Mother of Christ the Head, when she conceived Him she conceived the faithful. Thus she is the mother of the whole body. This is why her maternity, declared by Christ from the Cross, is not simply a motherhood in the moral sense (as in the case of adoption) or merely symbolism. Mary's motherhood to the disciples is a real motherhood and thus a real authority. The Fathers of the Church call Mary the New Eve because by her obedience she is the Mother of the Redeemer and thus the woman through whom the human race is reborn.

The Compassion of Mary

The Woman is the covenantal partner of Christ. Christ, the priest and the victim offers the one sacrifice truly acceptable to the Father. Christ's offering brings about the covenant of the New People of God. Thus its reality requires the response of creation. The response is not a passivity—a mere reception of God's gifts of grace. The response is an active participation in the sacrifice that effects redemption. It is Mary who gives the first and definitive response. Her response makes her the Mother of the faithful. Her response is a compassion with Christ as she fulfills the feminine responsibility for the New Covenant. Pope Benedict XV teaches:

¹⁵ Pope Pius X, *Ad deum illum*, Feb. 2, 1904, *Papal Documents on Mary*, ed. William J. Doherty and Joseph P. Kelly (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1954), 139.

To such an extent did she suffer and almost die with her suffering and dying Son, and to such an extent did she surrender her maternal rights over her Son for man's salvation, and immolated Him, insofar as she could, in order to appease the justice of God, that we may rightly say that she redeemed the human race together with Christ.¹⁶

Pope Pius XII in the conclusion of his encyclical *Mystici Corporis* states:

It was she, the second Eve, who free from all sin, original or personal, and always intimately linked with her Son, offered Him on Golgotha to the eternal Father for all the children of Adam, sin-stained by his unhappy fall, and her mother's rights and her mother's love were included in the holocaust. Thus she who was mother of our Head, through the added title of pain and glory became, according to the Spirit, the mother of His members.¹⁷

At Calvary Mary is not a passive on-looker. The crucifixion of her Son is not something that just "happens" to her. Mary actively participates in the sacrifice by offering up her Son. It is a mother's sacrifice; the sacrifice of the New Eve. Her sacrifice is different from Christ's but is in covenantal union with it. Without her sacrifice, the New Creation would not be established. Mary's offering up of Christ is the fulfillment of her "fiat" as the New Eve to the New Adam. This offer is specific to feminine responsibility for the faith. The New Eve held Christ in her womb but her motherhood in bringing forth

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XV, *Inter Sodalicia*, March 22, 1918, *Mary in the Documents of the Church*, ed. Paul F. Palmer (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), 97.

¹⁷ Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, June 10, 1943, (Boston: St. Paul Editions), 66.

the Head resides equally in letting Him go. The Mother of Christ must let Him be the Savior. Louis Bouyer states:

The final gesture, the most sublime perhaps, that a mother has to make is to renounce possession of her child's life, to accept that it should be lived on its own terms. With Mary, this renunciation meant accepting that Christ should deliver himself up to his Father's will, that is, to the Cross.¹⁸

The Response of Mary, the Response of Man

The New Covenant could not have been formed without cooperation coming from the side of man. If nothing else, the "fiat" of Mary demonstrates this. The response that Mary gives at Calvary is the feminine response of God's graced creation to the sacrificial love of the New Adam. At Calvary, Mary is not simply a single person whose response to and participation in the Passion of her Son begins and ends with her. Mary represents the Church, the collectivity of the redeemed. The Church is the covenantal partner in redemption—the Body and Bride of Christ.

Because Mary gives her consent to the Cross and offers Christ upon it the faithful are represented by her. In other words, Mary really can stand in for them because she is their mother. In Mary the entire reality of the faithful is present at Calvary.

Because Mary is the New Eve of the Protogospel, the covenantal partner of Christ, she is the origin of a New Humanity. This New Humanity, born from the covenant between Christ and Mary, has Mary as its model and mode of existence. The motherhood of Mary and the motherhood of the Church partakes of the same reality. The Church comes from the maternal "yes" of Mary to the salvific mission of her Son and exists within this reality. Mary's graced

¹⁸ Louis Bouyer, *Seat of Wisdom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 162-3.

response to Christ produces a New People. She has other children born in the likeness of the "firstborn of all creation."

The order of redemption is the relation of the Head and the Body; their covenantal one-flesh union. Therefore, the Church is not Christ. She is not a mere continuation, in a monadic fashion of the Incarnation. If anything, the Church is the continuation of Mary. The Church is her feminine reality extended in history. Her "yes" is an authoritative life-giving word. In Mary we see the utter indispensability of feminine responsibility for the faith. Without woman the covenant of redemption would not be fulfilled.