

Laurie Olsen

Mary and the Church at Vatican II: The Untold Story of Lumen Gentium VIII

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Mary and the Church at Vatican II: The Untold Story of Lumen Gentium VIII is a book of great importance for both Mariology and Vatican II studies. The author, Dr. Laurie Olsen, has broken new ground in this volume because of her research into the Vatican Apostolic Archives, the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV). She began this research while writing her doctoral thesis at the University of St. Thomas in Rome. Over several years, she carefully investigated the contents of over 200 AAV boxes—including audio recordings of closed-door deliberations and discussions that led to *Lumen Gentium*'s final text on the Blessed Virgin Mary. There have been many books about Vatican II, but there have been few that have investigated the process involved in the drafting of chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*, which is entitled “The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and the Church.”

In the years preceding Vatican II, there were different movements in Mariology. Scholars such as Charles Balić O.F.M. and Gabriele Roschini O.S.M. favored a more Christo-typical Mariology, which focused on Mary's collaboration with Christ in the work of redemption and the mediation of grace. There were other theologians, such as Yves Congar O.P. and Gérard Philips, who favored a more Ecclesio-typical Mariology, which highlighted Mary's role as the type of the Church. There were also liturgical and ecumenical movements, which influenced the discussions on Mariology at the council.

At the Council, the various movements in Mariology became manifest, and the discussions often reflected an effort to balance competing concerns. The deliberations of the experts and bishops sometimes manifested agreement on essential Marian doctrines but

disagreement over how best to express them. There were, to be sure, tensions in the midst of these discussions. The Church is both human and divine, and the human element is presented by Dr. Olsen in an uncensored and objective manner. She presents the various disagreements – e.g., whether to have Mary treated in a separate document, whether to speak of Mary as mediatrix, or whether to affirm Mary as Mother of the Church—and she identifies those who participated in these disagreements and the positions they held. For example, she shows that the famed Mariologist, René Laurentin, was opposed to using the title, *Mater Ecclesiae* (Mother of the Church) for Mary (pages 20–25). She also shows that Cardinal Franz König’s arguments for the insertion of the Marian text into the Constitution of the Church were initially drafted by Msgr. Gérard Philips. They were then circulated under the guise of a handout by three South American bishops (p.53). In actuality, though, the handout was authored by René Laurentin, Yves Congar, O.P. and others who were opposed to having a separate Marian document.

There are other revelations in Dr. Olsen’s book. She shows how Msgr. Philips was opposed to the expression *virginitas in partu* (p. 89), and he also tried to have reference to Mary as mediatrix removed (pages 91–92). She highlights the important interventions of Archbishop Pietro Parente, who argued in favor of Mary’s participation in the mystery of redemption (pages 107–114). She shows how the Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner, accepted Mary as mediatrix and coredemptrix, but he argued that the council should not speak of her in these terms. Rahner also was opposed to citing St. Irenaeus’s affirmation of Mary as *causa salutis* (cause of salvation), which was eventually included in *Lumen Gentium*, 56 (p. 118).

There are some facts brought out in Dr. Olsen’s book that might be disturbing. For example, she shows how Msgr. Philips and the Belgian group (the *squadra Belga*) misrepresented the number of council fathers who wanted the paragraph on Marian mediation strengthened. The actual count was 269, but Philips reported the number as 132 (pages 170–174 and 319–320 in Appendix 7). Details such as these are supported by the inclusion of eight appendices that

not only provide tabulations of important votes but also some significant texts (e.g. those of Laurentin and Balić). Appendix 8 (pages 341–352) provides a very valuable chronology of the Marian discussions and decisions of the council.

Much more can be said about this extremely important book. Dr. Olsen deserves a great deal of credit not only for her research but also for her clear and detailed presentation of her findings. Some of the revelations might be disturbing, but other aspects are encouraging. For example, it is clear that the Holy Spirit made use of certain theologians (e.g. Archbishop Parente) to preserve the integrity of Catholic Marian doctrine at the council. We must remember that *Lumen Gentium* §54 states that it is not the mind of the council “to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified.”

Dr. Olsen’s exposition of the behind-the-scene discussions at Vatican II shows why and how certain Marian doctrines were viewed at the time of the council. Her monumental study is essential reading for Mariologists who wish to understand what still needs to be clarified in regard to the Virgin Mary’s role in the mystery of Christ and the Church.