

The Teaching of Mariology Since Vatican II

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November 21, 2024 will mark 60 years since the promulgation of Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church known as *Lumen Gentium*. In his November 21, 1964 address marking the close of the third session of Vatican II, St. Paul VI not only promulgated *Lumen Gentium*; he also solemnly declared the Virgin Mary to be the Mother of the Church with these words:

Therefore, for the glory of the Virgin Mary and for Our own consolation, We proclaim the Most Blessed Mary Mother of the Church, that is to say of all the people of God, of the faithful as well as of the Pastors, who call her the most loving Mother. And We wish that the Mother of God should be still more honored and invoked by the entire Christian people by this most sweet title.¹

In this same address, Paul VI points to Mary's presence in the economy of salvation as the basis for her role as the Mother of the Church:

Just as, in fact, the Divine Maternity is the basis for her special relationship with Christ, and for her presence in the economy of salvation brought about by Jesus Christ, thus it also constitutes the principal basis for the relations between Mary and the Church, since she is the mother of Him Who, right from the time of His

¹ Paul VI, Address at the Conclusion of Session III of Vatican II (November 21, 1964) is available in Latin, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese on the Vatican website: https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641121_conclusions-iii-sessions.html. The English translation is taken from: <https://vaticaniiat50.wordpress.com/2014/11/22/pope-pauls-speech-at-closing-session/>

Incarnation in her virginal bosom, joined to Himself as head of His Mystical Body which is the Church.²

Paul VI brings together Mary's role in the economy of salvation with her role as the Mother of the Church. In doing so he affirms the correct meaning of chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*, which is entitled "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church."

Unfortunately, what Vatican II taught about the Blessed Virgin Mary has not been adequately appreciated by many Catholic theologians. In spite of the rich synthesis of Marian doctrine found in *Lumen Gentium* chapter VIII, there was a notable decline in the academic study of Mariology in Catholic colleges, universities, and seminaries following the Council. Writing in 2017, Professor John Cavadini of the University of Notre Dame observed that Mariology, understood as "the theological study of Mary, has all but vanished from the theological mainstream and from theological curricula."³

Prior to Vatican II there was the "Marian Age" marked by a renewed theological interest in Mary, which flourished especially after the 1854 dogmatic proclamation of the Immaculate Conception.⁴ There were multiple Marian congresses focused on themes such as Marian coredeemption and mediation.⁵ Cardinal Désiré Joseph Mercier (1851–1926)—the Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels and the Primate of Belgium from 1906 to 1926—was active in petitioning for a dogmatic proclamation of Mary, Mediatrix of all graces until his death

² Ibid.

³ John C. Cavadini, "Introduction" to *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, edited by John C. Cavadini and Danielle M. Peters (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 2.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ See Giuseppe M. Besutti (2014) "I Congressi Mariani ed i relativi "Atti" dalla fine del sec. XIX al 1950," *Marian Library Studies*: Vol. 17 (2014) Article 27, Pages 345-364, available at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/ml_studies/vol17/iss1/27

in 1926.⁶ There were also petitions for the dogmatic proclamation of Mary's Assumption into heaven body and soul.

Between 1849 and 1950, these petitions “came from 113 Cardinals, eighteen Patriarchs, 2,505 archbishops and bishops, 32,000 priests and men religious, 50,000 religious women, 8,000,000 lay people.”⁷ Cardinal Mercier's efforts to have Mary defined as the Mediatrix of all graces did not succeed. The petitions for the Assumption, however, did succeed, and Pius XII defined the dogma of the Assumption in 1950.⁸

When St. John XXIII announced his plans to convene Vatican II on January 25, 1959, there was a preparatory phase during which many suggestions were made by bishops concerning the council. Fr. Michael O'Carroll states that 382 bishops asked for a conciliar statement on Marian mediation, with 266 wanting a dogmatic definition.⁹ He also notes that 54 bishops wanted a conciliar statement on Mary as Co-redemptrix, with 36 seeking a dogmatic definition.¹⁰ Fr. G.M. Besutti believes that the numbers were higher, and he states that over 500 bishops wanted a definition on Mary's mediation of grace.¹¹

These petitions for new Marian dogmas manifested the concerns of many bishops. John XXIII, however, made it clear that there would not be any new dogmatic definitions because of the predominantly

⁶ See Manfred Hauke, *Mary, Mediatrix of Grace: Mary at the Foot of the Cross-IV: Supplement* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2004) and Gloria Falcão Dodd, *(The Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of All Grace: History and Theology of the Movement for a Dogmatic Definition from 1896–1964)* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2012).

⁷ Michael O'Carroll, C.S.S.p., *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 56.

⁸ See Pius XII, apostolic constitution, *Munificentissimus Deus* (November 1, 1950): https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html

⁹ O'Carroll, 352

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹¹ G.M. Besutti, O.S.M. *Lo Schema Mariano al Concilio Vaticano II* (Rome: Edizioni Marianum, 1966), 17.

pastoral orientation of the council.¹² The treatment of Mariology at Vatican II, nevertheless, shows a concern for Marian co-redemption and Marian mediation. In the *praenotanda* or explanatory note that accompanied the first Marian schema of 1962, we are told that: “Certain terms and expressions used by Roman Pontiffs have been omitted, which, although most true in themselves (*in se verissima*), may be difficult for the separated brethren (as in the case of the Protestants) to understand. Among such words the following may be enumerated: ‘Coredemptrix of the human race’ [St. Pius X, Pius XI]; ‘Reparatrix of the whole world’ [Leo XIII], etc.,”¹³

Although *Lumen Gentium* avoids the title co-redemptrix, it clearly affirms Mary’s cooperation with the work of redemption at the Annunciation in no. 56 and under the Cross in no. 58. This is why some theologians, including Jean Galot, S.J and Georges Cottier, O.P. (the former theologian of the papal household), believe Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* affirms the doctrine of Mary as Coredemptrix in several places without using the term.¹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 54 also makes it clear that Vatican II had no intention of providing “a complete doctrine on Mary;” neither did it “wish to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified.” Therefore, “those opinions therefore may be lawfully retained which are propounded in Catholic schools concerning her. . . .”

Lumen Gentium chapter VIII provides a fine synthesis of Catholic Mariology even though it does not claim to offer a complete doctrine of the Virgin Mary. Why, though, did Mariology fall into decline after Vatican II? The answer, I believe, is one of perception. During the council, some bishops and theologians favored what is known as the “Christotypical” approach to Mariology, which emphasizes Mary’s unique cooperation with Christ in the work of redemption. Others

¹² Mark Miravalle, “*With Jesus*” *The Story of Mary Co-Redemptrix* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2003), 168.

¹³ *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Volumen I, Periodus Prima, Pars IV* [Vatican City, 1971], p. 99.

¹⁴ See Jean Galot S.J. in *La Civiltà Cattolica* [1994] III: 236-237 and Georges Cottier, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, June 3–4, 2002), p. 8.

avored what is known as an ecclesiotypical approach, which highlights Mary as a member of the Church and an example of Christian discipleship. The Christotypical approach was favored by Carl Balić, O.F.M. (1899–1977), the founder of the Pontifical Marian Academy International, who was one of the drafters of *Lumen Gentium*, chapter VIII. The ecclesiotypical approach was favored by Msgr. Gérard Philips (1899–1972), who was the principal editor of the entire text of *Lumen Gentium*.¹⁵ The ecclesiotypical approach was especially promoted by bishops and theologians from Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands who were concerned about ecumenical issues. Because Vatican II decided to integrate Mariology into *Lumen Gentium* rather than have a separate document on the Virgin Mary, there emerged the perception that the council had opted for an ecclesiotypical approach to Mariology rather than a Christotypical one.

I believe this perception is based on a misunderstanding of what happened at the Council. The vote for the integration of the Marian *schema* into *Lumen Gentium* was actually a return to an earlier plan to include the treatment of Mary in the constitution on the Church. This plan was in force from October 1960 until January 1962. The theological commission, however, opted for a separate document after receiving the *schema* from the drafting committee in January 1962. The theological commission approved the *schema* as a separate document on November 23, 1962. In September 1963 seven council Fathers, however, requested a return to the earlier plan for integration. A vote was taken on this request on October 29, 1963 with the option for inclusion being adopted by a narrow vote of 1,114 to 1,074.¹⁶

When it was decided that Mariology would be integrated into the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, the Polish bishops and some others argued that the chapter on Mary should appear early in the constitution rather than at the end. On September 16, 1964,

¹⁵ Manfred Hauke, *Introduction to Mariology*, translated by Richard Chonak (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2021), 96.

¹⁶ O'Carroll, 352

Archbishop Karol Wojtyła made an intervention in which he argued that an earlier placement of the chapter on Mary would be appropriate. This is because the office (*munus*) of the Virgin Mary consists in building up the Mystical Body of Christ: first by giving birth to his physical body and then by her unique participation in the “works of Redemption and Salvation accomplished by Christ” (*opera Redemptionis et Salvationis a Christo peracta*), a participation that continues forever (*continuat in saecula*).¹⁷ The proposal of Archbishop Wojtyła, the future pope and saint, was not accepted. Nevertheless, the theology of his proposal was later incorporated into the Marian teachings of his pontificate.

The perceived victory of ecclesiotypical Mariology at Vatican II continues to have some unfortunate effects. In a book originally published in German in 1980, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger observed that “the immediate outcome of the victory of ecclesiocentric Mariology was the collapse of Mariology altogether.”¹⁸ St. Paul VI tried to offset this situation by his apostolic exhortation, *Marialis Cultus* of 1974, and St. John Paul II sought to renew Marian doctrine and devotion throughout his pontificate.

In spite of these papal efforts, Catholic colleges, universities, and seminaries have not given Mariology sufficient attention since Vatican II. In 2015–2016, I conducted a survey of 32 major Catholic seminaries in the USA, and I found out that only 9 out of the 32 had a required stand-alone course in Mariology.¹⁹ While almost all the

¹⁷ See Exc.mus P.D. Carolus Wojtyła, Archiepiscopus Cracoviensis (no. 51) in *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II* Volumen III Periodus Tertia Part II Congregationes Generales LXXXIII–LXXXIX (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, MCMLXXIV [1974]), pages 178–179.

¹⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, “Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in faith and Theology as a Whole” in Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: the Church at the Source* trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 24.

¹⁹ See Robert L. Fastiggi, “Teaching Mariology in Catholic Seminaries in the USA” in *Religions* 2023, 14(2), 275; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020275>

seminaries had an elective course in Mariology, it was generally not required.²⁰ The majority of the seminaries seem to believe that Mariology should be covered in Ecclesiology because of the decision at Vatican II to integrate Marian doctrine into *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. The failure to have a required Mariology course in Catholic seminaries seems to run counter to a 1988 document of the Congregation for Catholic Education, which states:

Considering the importance of the Virgin in the history of salvation and in the life of the people of God, and after the promptings of Vatican Council II and the Popes, **it would be unthinkable that the teaching of Mariology be obscured today: it is necessary, therefore, that it be given its just place in seminaries and theological faculties** (emphasis added).²¹

The lack of proper formation in Mariology has had some negative effects on Catholic theology. The International Theological Commission [ITC], for example, issued a document in 2012 entitled *Theology Today: Perspective, Principles, and Criteria*.²² In many ways, it is a very fine document that places emphasis on the priority of the Word of God and revelation through Christ. There is, though, not a single mention of Mary in the document. I brought this to the attention of

²⁰ Although Mariology is not required in most US Catholic seminaries, there are encouraging signs of an increase in Marian devotions among the students.

²¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Virgin Mary in Intellection and Spiritual Formation* (March 25 1988), no. 27: <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/m/magisterial-documents-the-virgin-mary-in-intellectual-and-spiritual-formation.php>. This document is cited in footnote 396 (p. 134) in the *Program for Priestly Formation in the United States of America* Sixth Edition (Washington, D.C. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops,, 2022) in no. 328, where Mariology is included in the list of topics that must be covered in the core of dogmatic theology.

²²International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspective, Principles, and Criteria* (2012): https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_tologia-oggi_en.html

one member of the ITC, and I was told that there was a section on Mary, but it was removed because the document needed to be reduced in length. This conscious decision to remove the Virgin Mary from a document on “theology today” is disheartening. It suggests that Catholic theology today can be done without any reference to the Mother of God. Without reference to the Virgin Mary, there is the danger that theology will become overly masculine and deprived of the feminine genius.

During a July 28, 2013 in flight press conference, Pope Francis offered this important insight:

A Church without women is like the college of the Apostles without Mary. The role of women in the Church is not simply that of maternity, being mothers, but much greater: it is precisely to be the icon of the Virgin, of Our Lady; what helps make the Church grow! But think about it, Our Lady is more important than the Apostles! She is more important! The Church is feminine. She is Church, she is bride; she is mother.²³

Pope Francis is correct. The Virgin Mary is more important than the Apostles, and she is essential to the life of the Church. In fact, the Church is only the Body of Christ because Mary conceived and gave birth to Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body, which is the Church.

Mary is also essential to theology. All the popes since Vatican II have spoken of the central role of the Virgin Mary in the economy of salvation and her importance for Catholic theology. In his December 5, 2014 address to the International Theological Commission, Pope Francis reminded the members of this commission that the Virgin Mary is “the teacher of authentic theology:”

²³ Pope Francis, press conference on the return flight from World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro (July 28, 2013): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-conferenza-stampa.html

The Immaculate Virgin, as a privileged witness of the great events of salvation history, “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19): A woman of listening, a woman of contemplation, a woman of closeness to the problems of the Church and of the people. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with all the resources of her feminine genius, she has not ceased entering ever more deeply into “all the truth” (cf. Jn 16:13). Mary is thus the icon of the Church which, eagerly awaiting her Lord, progresses day after day in her understanding of the faith, thanks also to the patient work of men and women theologians. **Mary the Madonna, the teacher of authentic theology**, obtain for us—with her maternal prayer—that our charity “may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (Phil 1:9).²⁴

Mary is the teacher of authentic theology because she is a woman of contemplation. Pope Francis highlights this contemplative, sapiential dimension of theology in his November 1, 2023 apostolic letter, issued *motu proprio*, *Ad Theologiam Promovendam*.²⁵ In no. 7 of this letter, he reminds us that theology cannot be merely abstract and ideological. Instead, it must be “elaborated on the knees, pregnant with adoration and prayer; a transcendent knowledge and, at the same time, attentive to the voice of the people (*elaborato in ginocchio, gravido di adorazione e di preghiera; un sapere trascendente e, al contempo, attento alla voce dei popoli*). Mary helps us do theology in this manner because she is

²⁴ Pope Francis, Address to the International Theological Commission (December 5, 2014): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141205_commissione-teologica-internazionale.html (I have made some minor changes to the translation in the cited passage after consulting the Italian original).

²⁵ Pope Francis, apostolic letter issued *motu proprio*, *Ad Theologiam Promovendam* (November 1, 2023): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu_proprio/documents/20231101-motu-proprio-ad-theologiam-promovendam.html

the woman of contemplation who knows her divine Son better than any theologian.

The Virgin Mary not only helps us do theology, she also is essential to the content of theology. Pope Francis makes it clear that we cannot understand Jesus without his Mother. In his January 1, 2015 homily for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, the Holy Father says:

Mary is so closely united to Jesus because she received from him the knowledge of the heart, the knowledge of faith, nourished by her experience as a mother and by her close relationship with her Son. The Blessed Virgin is the woman of faith who made room for God in her heart and in her plans; she is the believer capable of perceiving in the gift of her Son the coming of that “fullness of time”(Gal 4:4) in which God, by choosing the humble path of human existence, entered personally into the history of salvation. **That is why Jesus cannot be understood without his Mother** (emphasis added).²⁶

Pope Francis, like St. John Paul II, is also aware that Mary, according to God’s plan, is essential to the economy of salvation. In his homily of January 1, 2020, he reminds us that “there is no salvation without the 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 forth and thus there is no salvation without the 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. That is why we begin the year by celebrating Our Lady, the

²⁶ Pope Francis, homily (January 1, 2015): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150101_omelia-giornata-mondiale-pace.html.

woman who wove the humanity of God. If we want to weave humanity into this our time, we need to start again from the woman.²⁷

In his September 15, 2021 homily, the Holy Father states that “Mary shared in her Son’s mission of salvation, even to the foot of the Cross.”²⁸ In his general audience of February 16, 2022, Pope Francis cites *Lumen Gentium*, 58 to remind us that Mary cannot be separated from her Son in the plan of salvation.²⁹

In the plan of salvation, the Son cannot be separated from the Mother, from the one who “advanced in the pilgrimage of faith and faithfully preserved her union with her Son even to the Cross” (*Lumen Gentium*, 58), as the Second Vatican Council reminds us.

There is much more that can be said about why the study of Mariology is so important for Catholic theology. There are so many writings of saints, mystics, and popes on the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of salvation. There is also the need to study Mary in the liturgy, as well as Marian devotions, prayers, and apparitions. Without proper theological training in Mariology, Catholic theology will not be truly Catholic.

The decision at Vatican II to include Mariology in the constitution of the Church was **not** a decision to reduce Marian theology to a few lectures in an ecclesiology class. We are grateful that there is a

²⁷ Pope Francis, homily (January 1, 2020): <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2024/documents/20240101-omelia-madredidio-pace.html>. I have slightly adjusted the translation changing “there is no salvation without **a** woman” to “there is no salvation without **the** woman” in light of the original Italian: “*non c’è salvezza senza **la** donna.*”

²⁸ Pope Francis, homily in Sastin, Slovakia (September 15, 2021): <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/20210915-omelia-sastin.html>

²⁹ Pope Francis, General Audience (February 16, 2022): <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2022/documents/20220216-udienza-generale.html>

growing awareness among the faithful of the need for a deeper Mariology that is not simply ecclesiotypical. The International Marian Association is committed to the study of the full truth about Mary, who is indeed “the teacher of authentic theology.”