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Who knows Mary? Her Place in Tradition, Devotion and Church Teaching

By Glenn Morrison

This article is peer reviewed.

This article seeks to present a narrative of the development of theology and devotion to Mary, from Old Testament motifs to Church teaching authority (Magisterium) directives today. The Christian person of faith can be quite unfamiliar with Mariology, the theological study of Mary. Yet, by taking a step back to the story of salvation history in the bible, and then journeying through the centuries to appreciate her theological significance animated through devotional practices, there exists a possible discovery to arrive at a more informed position of the Magisterium's call for formation and catechesis concerning veneration of Mary through pious practices. In this way, the Christian faithful are able to be more sensitive to the danger of Mariolatry (idolatry of Mary), more attentive to her subordinate role in relation to Christ, and therefore more aware of her humanity as a woman and mother, blessed and full of grace (Lk 1:28, 42) who gives her 'yes' (Lk 1:38) for us.

Introduction: Mary in the Bible

The three Patriarchs in the Old Testament, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are familiar figures within the Old Testament narrative of salvation history. Together, throughout the Old Testament and in a few instances in the New Testament, they take form in the rubric, 'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' (e.g. Ex 3:6 and 1 Kings 18:36; and Acts 7:32 and Matt 22:32). In contrast, the Jewish tradition of prayer and blessing (*Amidah*) also emphasises four Matriarchs in the Old Testament, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. However, neither the word, 'Matriarch' nor the rubric or set of these four names appear in the Old Testament.¹ Nonetheless, the Matriarchs in the Old Testament have great merit. According to *Genesis Rabbah*, a midrash (biblical interpretation or exegesis) of rabbinic homilies, 'The Matriarchs were prophetesses'.² The rabbinic literature also saw merit in the Matriarchs as a 'major factor in the redemption of the Jewish people,' and that God did not only make his covenant with the patriarchs, but also with their wives.³ The experiences, challenges and sufferings of the Old Testament Matriarchs gave voice to the grace and nature of womanhood, of being close to God to gestate and animate life into a 'hospitality

¹ Alvan H. Kaunfer, 'Who Knows Four? The Imahot in Rabbinic Judaism,' *Judaism* 44, no. 1 (1995): 94.

² Kaunfer, 'Who Knows Four?,' 97.

³ Kaunfer, 'Who Knows Four?,' 97.

and generosity'⁴ of blessing, to be 'guardians' of the human heart and covenantal love of God, and to share the 'fruitfulness'⁵ of the divine mercy of God.

Mary has been presented to us through the lives and actions of these and other Israelite women. Through the centuries, Christian theologians, in the process of developing Mariology, have not been remiss to reflect upon the lives of the Matriarchs and other Old Testament women such as Yocheved (mother of Moses), Miriam (elder sister of Moses), Ziporrah (wife of Moses), Hannah, Ruth, Esther, Judith and Deborah. For Mary, read through the Old Testament, is the 'daughter of Zion' (Cf. Isa 37:22 and Zech 9:9).⁶ Bearing the Old Testament tradition, she is given Hannah's words as her own where she proclaims the Magnificat (See 1 Sam 2:1-10, Lk 1:46-55). Moreover, Mary's miraculous birth positions her in the line of the Matriarchs and other great women of Israel. Her willingness to follow her Son even unto the Cross parallels Ruth's journey and determination. After the death of her husband and two sons in Moab, Ruth journeys with her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Bethlehem. One could perhaps imagine Mary at the foot of the Cross pondering (cf. Lk 1:29) Ruth's words, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die - there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!' (Ruth 1:16-17).

Mary's determination to witness maternal love and devotion for her son also proves as decisive as Queen Esther's determination to save her people from extermination from the evil high official, Haman. Where Queen Esther helps to 'revoke' (Esth 8:4) Haman's letters to 'destroy the Jews' through winning 'favour' from the King (Esth 8:5), Mary, finding 'favour' (Lk 1:28) with God, 'revokes' all that is evil in the vision of the Annunciation to become the mother of the 'Lord' (Lk 1:43). The story of the heroine Queen Esther, having thwarted the evil intentions of Haman, also shows some points of contact with St. John's apocalyptic apparition of 'the woman clothed with the Sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (Rev 12:1). The primary reference to 'the woman' is to 'the people of God, Israel, and the Church'.⁷ However, a secondary layer of interpretation in the writings of John reveals that 'the woman' is also Mary, the Second or New Eve, in her dramatic role of 'ultimate victory in times of persecution'⁸ against the 'great dragon', the 'ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world' (Rev 12:9).

⁴ Oscar Momanyi, 'The Children of Sara, Hagar and Mary,' *The Way* 56, no. 2 (April 2017): 73.

⁵ Kaunfer, 'Who Knows Four?,' 101.

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 24.

⁷ Raymond E. Brown et. al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament* (London: Chapman, 1978), 235.

⁸ Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 231.

The Old Testament is rich in stories and motifs to inspire Christians to appreciate the merit of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and her role in the drama of salvation. Pelikan points out that ‘the entire patristic tradition East and West, ... carried on such study of the foreshadowing of Mary in the Old Testament’.⁹ Indeed, such use of the biblical imagination of faith was ‘part of a much larger process of allegorical (especially spiritual) and figurative (literal) interpretation of the Bible.’¹⁰ From such a disposition of devotion animating theological and biblical reflection, to use Pelikan’s blunt words, ‘it was permissible and even mandatory to ransack the pages of the Old Testament for additional information about her.’¹¹ It was not surprising then that the devotion and theology of Mary, oriented by the stories and images of the Old Testament, grew in richness of understanding especially as it opened the human heart to the Church and the mysteries of the faith.

In Luke’s Gospel, the angel Gabriel appears to a virgin, named Mary, who tells her that she will conceive a son. In this dramatic encounter in the mystery of the Incarnation, Mary, ‘daughter of Zion’ (‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!’ (Zech 9:9)), becomes the type of Church, that is to say, ‘the fleshly model of Church (the Church gives birth to Christ spiritually)’.¹² In this way, as the type and model of Church, Mary, full of grace (Lk 1:28), guides the faithful to find full expression of ‘identity and mission’¹³: to be a person in Christ.

As the ‘personal epitome of the Church and the New Testament,’¹⁴ she stands before her son crucified (Jn 19:25-27). Mary, before the Cross, gestures compassion and mercy for all Christians called to discipleship. Through her mercy, vulnerability and humility, suffering and compassion, Mary is the ‘perfect daughter of Zion,’ ‘model of the Church’ and archetype (‘model of faith for all believers’).¹⁵ It is not surprising then that Mary, referred to as ‘woman’ in the New Testament (Jn 2:4, 19:26, Gal 4:4), having defeated the devil,¹⁶ is identified as ‘the Second Eve’ and ‘heir of the history of Israel’.¹⁷ For, ‘In her, Israel brings forth the Saviour; in her the Church’s pilgrimage of faith finds its model’.¹⁸

⁹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 24.

¹⁰ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 25.

¹¹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 34.

¹² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama, Theological Dramatic Theory, Volume III, The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco, 1992), 338.

¹³ John Thornhill SM, *Sign & Promise: A Theology of the Church for a Changing World* (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1988), 226.

¹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, Vol. III, 339.

¹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, Vol. III, 334-338.

¹⁶ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 27.

¹⁷ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 15.

¹⁸ Thornhill, *Sign & Promise*, 222.

Approaching Mariology from the Early Church to Vatican II: 'Quantum Leaps'

A few centuries after the New Testament period, there occurred 'the greatest quantum leap in the whole history of the language and thought about Mary'.¹⁹ Mary was not only venerated as the Second Eve, but also as Theotokos (literally meaning 'the one who gave birth to the one who is God' or simply, 'God-bearer,' and commonly 'rendered' as 'Mother of God').²⁰ The term has its origins where Elizabeth greets Mary with 'the mother of my Lord' (Lk 1:43). It was a natural leap then to apply the term, 'Lord' (Hebrew *Adonai*, Greek *kyriou*, and referring to the unpronounceable Hebrew name for God, YHWH), to Christ and his divinity as God.²¹ After all the Shema (Deut 6:4), 'Here, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord,' placing Lord and God together is 'repeated by Christ in the Gospels' (Mk 12:29).²²

By the third century, the first liturgical and devotional use of Theotokos arises in the hymn, *Sub tuum praesidium*: 'Under your mercy we take refuge, Theotokos. Do not overlook our petitions in adversity, but rescue us from danger, uniquely holy one and uniquely blessed one'.²³ Mary's role, through the foundations of Scripture and theology, and animated by popular devotion and piety, now takes a decisive turn towards becoming the help of Christians and being embedded in theological dogma and doctrine. The Council of Ephesus in 431 CE 'did not find it difficult to move from Elizabeth's formula of Mary as 'the mother of my Lord' to Cyril's (Archbishop of Alexandria) formula of Mary as 'Theotokos'.²⁴ If the Bible had opened the door to Marian theological reflection and devotion, then Ecumenical Church Councils and the piety of the faithful together pulled the door wide open. Now the Church, having struggled to reach consensus to understand Mary as Theotokos, faced new challenges in the wake of such a 'quantum leap'.

From the 5th century, a tension began to exist between first the Church's desire to emphasise Mary, Theotokos, as Mother, disciple and associate of Christ in and through his salvific work of redemption; and second, the piety of clergy and laity to honour, venerate and commemorate Mary, a privileged human being, as 'the crown of creation'.²⁵ This phrase was 'inadequate' to understand Christ just like the Arian²⁶ perception (predicating and asserting Christ as lesser being than God, namely 'the

¹⁹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 57.

²⁰ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 55.

²¹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 16.

²² Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 16.

²³ Richard M. Price, 'The Theotokos and the Council of Ephesus,' in Chris Maunder, ed., *The Origins of the Cult of Virgin Mary* (London: Burns & Oates, 2008), 89.

²⁴ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 16.

²⁵ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 57.

²⁶ Arianism was a fourth century heresy that denied the divinity of Christ and saw him as a creature of God in whom the fullness of God dwelt. See Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 64.

highest of all saints and therefore a mediator between God and humanity'²⁷). However, 'the portrait of Mary' in the writings of Athanasius 'would fit the Arian description of the Son of God'.²⁸ To modern sensibilities, the danger of Mariolatry seemed to present itself in this great saint, theologian and bishop of Alexandria in Egypt. Notwithstanding, Pelikan points out there was no danger of falling into Marian idolatry or seeking 'facile attempts' to see a Marian connection with the 'Greek goddess Artemis or Diana'.²⁹ Balthasar adds, 'All the same, like her Son, she is subject to the law of mortality; she is no goddess (Theodosius, John Damascene, Germanus)'.³⁰ Theotokos was completely 'an original Christian creation'.³¹ Further, in many instances, devotion to Mary had a programmatic or commanding role in the development of Marian theology. This is not without merit for it exemplifies the Early Church principle 'of *lex orandi lex credendi*, that implicit in Christian worship there was a normative doctrinal content, which needed to be made explicit'.³²

One could not imagine veneration to Mary without images. Indeed, as devotion to Mary developed in the 5th century through iconic images, several popes sought to commission Marian mosaics, frescos and paintings to decorate the churches in Rome.³³ Even the movement of Iconoclasm in 8-9th century Byzantium 'which questioned devotion not only to icons, but possibly also to saints and the Theotokos, served to consolidate these cults'.³⁴ From the High to Late Middle Ages, where scholastic theology was developing the notion of the individual to make satisfaction for sin, the Western Church had made another 'quantum leap,' so to speak. From placing Mary as beautiful Virgin ('God's Treasure' and 'Our Lady') and Merciful Mother (Mediatrice), she became Queen of Heaven and Earth, the mediator to rescue sinners and who would bring personally the Son's redemption.³⁵ Elizabeth Johnson explains, '... ardent devotion welling up out of deep personal insecurity and encouraged by popular preaching placed Mary, Queen of Heaven and Refuge of Sinners, at the dependable centre of the progress of salvation'.³⁶ Mary, the 'handmaid of the Lord' (Lk 1:28), is also 'a woman of valour' (Prov 31:10), a medieval 'motif and metaphor of Mary as warrior and champion, as conqueror and leader'.³⁷

²⁷ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 64.

²⁸ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 57, 64.

²⁹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 56, 58.

³⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, Vol. III, 337.

³¹ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 58.

³² Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 59.

³³ Eileen Rubery, 'Pope John VII's Devotion to Mary: Papal Images of Mary from the Fifth to the Early eight Century,' in Maunder, ed., *Origins of the Cult of Mary*, 155-157.

³⁴ Mary B. Cunningham, 'Mary as Intercessor in Constantinople during the Iconoclast Period: The Textual Evidence,' in Leena Mari Peltomaa, Andreas Külzer and Pauline Allen, eds., *Presbeia Theothokou: The Intercessory Role of Mary across Times and Places in Byzantium (4th-9th Century)* (Wien: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015), 139.

³⁵ Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'Marian Devotion in the Western Church,' in Jill Raitt, ed., in collaboration with Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 393-397.

³⁶ Johnson, 'Marian Devotion in the Western Church,' 393.

³⁷ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 81, 91.

For example, in the 'the early thirteenth century, Hélinand, a Cistercian monk of Froidmont, described the Old Testament heroine, Judith, as a type of Mary'.³⁸ In the Old Testament, the beautiful widow, Judith, saved the Israelites by successfully luring the Assyrian general, Holofernes, into her bedchamber where 'she struck his neck twice with all her might, and cut off his head' (Jth 13:8). It is not surprising then that this 13th Century monk saw Mary foreshadowed by Judith as the 'Hammer of Justice'.³⁹

An extremely popular medieval image and metaphor of Mary for mariners was 'Mary, the star of the sea [Maria maris Stella]'.⁴⁰ As the images and metaphors of Mary grew in abundance such as 'God's treasure,' 'star of the sea,' 'pure and beautiful virgin,' 'a woman of valour,' 'mediatrix,' 'Mother of Mercy,' 'Our Lady of Mercy' and 'Queen of Heaven,' the sense of Mary's 'divine maternity' [i.e. the Theotokos] developed making her 'status approach that of the Son in virtue and privilege'.⁴¹ Because of the merit of her suffering with Christ at the cross, Mary Theotokos was 'enthroned with Christ in glory ... active in ruling the word and in making salvation effective for those who called upon her,' and hence was exalted with the titles, verging into unorthodox doctrine, of *salvatrix* and *redemptrix*.⁴² The faithful, seeking her 'infallible' protection from insecurities such as plagues, schisms and wars, turned to Mary, 'The Queen Mother of the judge' who 'drove the devils crazy'.⁴³ At the same time 'private piety disconnected from official teaching in great swatches'.⁴⁴ Altogether, Mary's divine maternity had the power to balance God's justice with her mercy, for after all, 'God himself was subject to her as a Son to his Mother, to whom he could refuse nothing'.⁴⁵

The post-Tridentine Church⁴⁶ had witnessed a growth of French devotional writers like St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort (1673-1716) who extolled 'the medieval idea that Christ always obeys his mother' in *The Secret of the Rosary*.⁴⁷ There was also an upsurge of congregations and confraternities devoted to Mary, and 20th century lay groups with 'a distinctive militant flavour' like St. Maximilian Kolbe's 'Militia Immaculate' or Frank Duff's 'Legion of Mary'.⁴⁸ In contrast, there were very few Catholic voices (reformers) like Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1566) to challenge

³⁸ Brittany E. Wilson, 'Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace: Jael, Judith, and Mary in Luke 1:42,' *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2006): 436.

³⁹ Wilson, 'Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace,' 436-437.

⁴⁰ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 93.

⁴¹ Johnson, 'Marian Devotion in the Western Church,' 395-406.

⁴² Johnson, 'Marian Devotion in the Western Church,' 406.

⁴³ Johnson, 'Marian Devotion in the Western Church,' 393, 409.

⁴⁴ Johnson, 'Marian Devotion in the Western Church,' 406.

⁴⁵ Johnson, 'Marian Devotion in the Western Church,' 406, 408.

⁴⁶ That is to say, after the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) that sought to uphold Catholic Doctrine as a response to the Reformation.

⁴⁷ Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion, Vol. 2 From the Reformation to the Present Day* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 150-151.

⁴⁸ Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 150-151.

the excessive practice of Marian devotion. Employing ‘biting sarcasms,’ Erasmus wrote in his work, *The Shipwreck*, ‘They implored the Virgin Mother, calling her Star of the Sea, Queen of Heaven, Mistress of the World, Port of Salvation and many other flattering titles which Holy Scripture nowhere applies to her’.⁴⁹ For the most part, only other reformers, Protestants like Luther and Calvin, followed Erasmus’ rationalism. Even when devotion to Mary needed reviving a few centuries later during the time of the Enlightenment, the Catholic Church faithful took to the solace of post-Tridentine voices like St. Alphonse Liguori. (1696-1787). His book, *The Glories of Mary*, acted as ‘a counterblast to the rationalism at the time ... that had little use for supernatural realities’.⁵⁰ Expressing Mary’s ‘unfailing assistance,’⁵¹ St. Alphonse enjoined the faithful to pray, ‘Behold, O Mother of God, Mary, behold me at your feet, a poor sinner begging for mercy. All the faithful all over the world proclaim you the ‘Refuge of Sinners.’ You are then, my refuge, and you must save me’.⁵² Veneration to Mary, in an age of deep insecurities, proved to be a vaccine, as it were, against any cold rationalism lacking a maternal heart. Indeed, during the era of the Counter Reformation, women mystics and visionaries like St Teresa of Avila (1515–82), Marie des Vallées (1590–1656), St Veronica Giuliani (1660–1727) gave witness to ‘the heart of Mary,’ that is to say for example of uniting one’s heart mystically with the hearts of Mary and Jesus.⁵³

By the eve of the Second Vatican Council, the popularity of devotion to the Virgin Mary had gained new heights of recognition, ‘quantum leaps’ as it were, through the infallible doctrines of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and Bodily Assumption into Heaven (1950). The faithful, partaking of the providence of Our Lady’s grace, explored and renewed their devotion to Mary through apparitions at Lourdes (1858) and Fatima (1917). This is not surprising as Pelikan notes that, ‘Literally thousands of such apparitions of the Virgin have been reported through the centuries, beginning with this one in the Book of Revelation.’⁵⁴ Furthermore, from the 19th century, the influence of the Virgin Mary among the faithful was now greater than any theological apologetics or ‘political defence of the institutional church’.⁵⁵ During the early 20th Century, the visions at Fatima (1917), like St. John’s vision and revelation, took on a more apocalyptic concern. Visions became ‘secrets’ to be ‘interpreted in the context of fears of nuclear annihilation and communist threats’.⁵⁶ The age of insecurities perhaps never leaves us. The human condition hungers for solace and

⁴⁹ Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 3.

⁵⁰ Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 77.

⁵¹ Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 77.

⁵² St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary: Ascetical Works Vol. 1* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1962), 49.

⁵³ Robert Fastiggi, ‘Mariology in the Counter Reformation’ in Chris Maunder, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 10-12, ebook, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198792550.001.0001.

⁵⁴ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 177.

⁵⁵ Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 183-184.

⁵⁶ Daniel Wocjik, ‘Marian Apocalypticism’ in Maunder, *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, 1-2.

protection and, in times of uncertainty, calamities and danger, may even seek signs, words and secrets of God's presence and revelation.

By the 20th century, 'the proper theme of ... Mariology [was] co-redemption ['Mary's active collaboration with Christ in the redemption of the world']'. In 1955, even the protestant professor of theology, Giovanni Miegge, echoing Catholic orthodoxy observed, 'The century that passes between the definition of the Immaculate Conception and our day is without equal in the intense, audacious and organic development of Mariology'.⁵⁷ The twentieth Century interest in Mary's co-redemption represents the pinnacle and height of understanding Mary's place in salvation: 'It concerns a central doctrine, or better, a culminating doctrine in which the whole preceding development of Mariology comes to its conclusive and synthetic formula'.⁵⁸ Marian doctrine was again on the verge and possibility of superseding the doctrine of Christ. In 1913, the Belgian Cardinal Mercier had sought 'with considerable support' to make Mary's mediation 'a dogma of the Church'.⁵⁹ Even in 1987, the soundings for the same Marian dogma to call Mary 'co-Redemptrix' reached intensity through 'a campaign' spanning 147 countries' which gained 'more than 4 million signatures' to form a petition to Pope John-Paul II.⁶⁰ Heresy in the eyes of several critics was looming as a new dogma of Mary as Mediatrix 'would give [her] equal status with Christ and replace the Trinity with a Quartet'.⁶¹ How then since Vatican II has the Church responded to the growing danger of Mariolatry, that is to say, the idolatry of Mary as an equal to, or greater than the tri-personal God?

Conclusion: In the Wake of Vatican II, Safeguarding Devotion to Mary from Idolatry

Looking at the history of Mariology, devotion to Mary has placed a profound character upon the Church. One cannot then separate ecclesiology, the study of the Church, from Mariology. The Church holds the two dramatic figures of Jesus and Mary together through prayer and liturgy, art and poetry, and theology and stories of faith. At its underlying theological truth, veneration to Mary Theotokos serves to deepen the sense of Jesus as messiah and Saviour, and that God is one. To this end, the Church since Vatican II has sought to take an active role to provide guidelines for Marian devotion to direct the development of theological reflection, formation and catechesis on Mary's role in the Church. There have been several key Church documents as a means to guide theologians, sacred ministers and the faithful lest they fall into excessive practices that verge on overstepping the tradition. The following documents give light to the dignity of Mary as a true archetype of faith:

⁵⁷ Giovanni Miegge, *The Virgin Mary: The Roman Catholic Marian Doctrine* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 155.

⁵⁸ Miegge, *The Virgin Mary*, 156.

⁵⁹ Thornhill, *Sign and Promise*, 224.

⁶⁰ 'Vatican: No New Marian Dogmas.' *The Christian Century* 114, no. 26 (1997): 829.

⁶¹ 'Vatican: No New Marian Dogmas,' 829.

Lumen Gentium (1964), *Signum Magnum* (1967), *Marialis Cultus* (1974), *Redemptoris Mater* (1987), *Mulieris Dignitae* (1988), the *Directory on Popular Piety and Liturgy* (2001), *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) and *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013).

Vatican II decided not to have a particular document on Mary. It discerned to include a text on Mary in *Lumen Gentium* (LG), namely 'Chapter VIII The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church'. The Church's intention sought to place more emphasis upon Mary as a 'model of the Church' rather than focusing on 'her unique greatness and privilege'.⁶² Explicitly, LG no. 62 points out that Mary 'cooperates' with Christ in the work of redemption through her 'subordinate role' to him. Further LG no. 67 provides guidance first to 'theologians and preachers of the divine word to abstain zealously both from all gross exaggerations as well as from petty narrow-mindedness in considering the singular dignity of the Mother of God'. Theologians and preachers should seek to study the bible and tradition of the Church and follow the guidance of the Magisterium. Such formation will necessarily orient these teachers of the faith to 'rightly illustrate the duties and privileges of the Blessed Virgin which always look to Christ, the source of all truth, sanctity and piety' (LG 67).

Certain key directives from LG found further expression, for example, in *Marialis Cultus* (MC) and the *Directory on Popular Piety and Liturgy* (DPPL). For example, looking at the more recent directives in the *Directory on Popular Piety and Liturgy*, 'Ch. 5 Veneration to the Blessed Mother of Our Lord,' issued by the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in December, 2001, one thing to first take notice is the term, 'veneration'. Twenty-five years earlier, Pope Paul VI in the apostolic exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, makes use of the term, 'veneration,' as an outpouring of 'devotion' to Mary noting her place in God's 'redemptive plan' (MC, Introduction, para. 1). In other words, veneration to Mary finds its place in Christian worship and devotion through her connection to Christ and the Trinity in the work of salvation. Given 'Mary [is] a model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries' (MC, Section 2, para. 1), there remains the underlying truth that veneration to Mary is 'subordinated' to the worship of Christ. Eternally 'connected' to Christ in her 'singular place' as Theotokos and companion-disciple, she takes up the 'pastoral role' of renewing the lives of the faithful within the Church (MC, Conclusion, para. 1).

Noting Mary's 'salvific mission,' the DPPL (no. 183) highlights that the 'fundamental principle' of Marian devotions and pious practices depends on the nature of Christian worship: (i) originating in Christ, (ii) finding full expression in Christ, and (iii) being Trinitarian. In other words, through God's redemptive plan in the incarnation we see a 'double movement' of 'grace and answer, gift and responsibility': (i) in Mary Theotokos, the Word becomes flesh (Jn 1:14), and (ii) in Mary Theotokos, we

⁶² Thornhill, *Sign and Promise*, 225-227.

receive her 'yes' (cf. Lk 1:38), the maternal gift of 'her flesh [word] for the other'.⁶³ This suggests that the Christian devotion of veneration of Mary through pious exercises expresses the otherness of God's love for us (1 Jn 3:16).

The DPPL (no. 186) affirms that the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary should 'give expression' to the Trinitarian aspect of worship found in the New Testament. Such veneration underlines the work of the Spirit animating faith and holiness in the Church. Veneration to Mary should further 'give expression' to Scripture. Possessing a biblical sensibility provides opportunities for anthropological and eschatological perspectives to develop (for example appreciating Mary's 'yes' as hope for eternal life) and which could further orient the Church's missionary role and work in ecumenical and interfaith relations.

What does this all mean in a practical sense for dioceses and parishes today? The DPPL calls for catechesis and formation stating, 'Pious exercises [such as celebrations of feasts and Marian months, hymns (e.g. Regina Coeli) and prayers (e.g. Angelus and the Rosary), 'Consecration or entrustment to Mary,' or wearing Scapulas and medals] cannot remain indifferent to the results of biblical and theological research on the Mother of Our Saviour. These should become a catechetical means diffusing such information, without however altering their essential nature' (no. 189). The DPPL relates, 'Opportune catechesis should remind the faithful that the weekly Sunday memorial of the Paschal Mystery is "the primordial feast day"' (no. 191). Hence, catechesis becomes a means to avoid the idolatry of Mary. Delicately, then, the DPPL (no. 204) advises that, '... the practice of consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary ... is, in reality, only analogously a 'consecration to God''. There is a 'correct liturgical manner' for such consecration: 'to the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, imploring the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom we entrust ourselves completely, so as to keep our baptismal commitments and live as her children'.

Far from wanting to discourage Marian devotion, the DPPL exemplifies that the Church is mindful of the extent of 'popular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary' and how the faithful 'instinctively distrust whoever does not honour her and will not tolerate those who dishonour her' (DPPL, no, 183). It becomes then opportune for the Magisterium to exhort 'all the faithful - sacred minister, religious and laity - to develop a personal and community devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary through the use of approved and recommended pious exercises' (DPPL, no. 183), and moreover to remind the faithful of the need for formation and catechesis.

Through the centuries, the Church has afforded great honour to Mary as a woman full of grace for all people. She is the Theotokos, and profoundly part of the Church's

⁶³ Roger Burggraeve (Professor of Theology, Catholic University of Leuven), email messages to author, 19 & 21 December, 2020.

history, tradition, identity and self-understanding. There is then, to take Marian devotion seriously, a duty of care and vigilance for Dioceses and Catholic parishes to work together, and support and guide the faithful in the veneration of Mary as Blessed Virgin and Mother of God, a woman blessed and full of grace, mercy and humility, ever vigilant to give her 'yes' to us. In a concluding word, to use an aboriginal metaphor, the 'dreaming' of Mary has been progressing for 2000 years. Let us then take to heart two of the 'Keepers' of the Dreaming,⁶⁴ Pope John XXIII and Pope Francis, whose words remain ever new as a teaching about Mary's role in the Church. Pope John XXIII exclaimed, 'The Madonna is not pleased when she is put above her son,'⁶⁵ and echoing these words, Pope Francis has recently stated that Mary's significance for Church and all the faithful lies in her identity 'as a mother. Not as a goddess. Not as a co-redemptrix. As a mother'.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Morris West employs this metaphor in his autobiography, *A View from the Ridge: The Testimony of a Pilgrim* (Sydney: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1996), 44.

⁶⁵ Epigraph in Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*.

⁶⁶ 'Francis says Mary is not 'co-redemptrix''. *CathNews: A Service of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference* (25 March 2021). <https://www.cathnews.com/cathnews/40591-francis-says-mary-is-not-co-redemptrix>