

Catholica Mater: The Marian insights of Henri de Lubac

“It is consummated,” cries the crucified Christ. With the Son, the Mother is consummated, and with the Mother, the Church whose heart and eyes she is, a sepulcher and a body. Behold the testament to which we are the heirs. Behold the outcome of the seven sorrows, the seven days, each of which contains an evening and a morning, a mystery of illumination. This sepulcher has become a baptistery where we are all immersed as children and where we continue to bathe whenever, overwhelmed with weariness and toil, we come to ask our Father to revive us and make us new.

—Paul Claudel, *Epée*, 193.

Mary is a woman of all times and seasons. Since the first century, Mary has lived in the mind and hearts of many a faithful. The history of Christian life and thought shows Mary within a mysterious flux and flow: she oscillates between the Virgin Bride and the Mother of the Church, from the answering Person to the Source of the race.¹ Mary is always both of these sides at once, and thus, she defies every theorizing attempt to be objectified into a rigid definition, concept, role, or principle. In this regard, Mary is a mystery of the Christian faith, and like all Christian mysteries, she is constitutively indefinable, describable only through symbols, and wholly derivative of the *one* mystery at the heart of Christianity: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is perhaps the greatest accomplishment of twentieth-century theological reflection on Mary to have rediscovered Mary as a mystery in both of her aspects and the resultantly intimate connection between Mary and the Church. This relationship between Mariology and ecclesiology, rooted in the baptismal and Eucharistic experience of the Church, both of which are simultaneously maternal (causally) and spousal (effectively), is recognized in the early Church and expressed through a rich application of symbols.

From the point of view of this rediscovery, the history of Marian thought and devotion could be seen as the search for this full expression. A new pathway for discovery was opened in the nineteenth century with Johann Adam Möhler, whose readings of the Church Fathers and recourse to symbolism over the hegemony of a dialectical method, allowed him to remember—which always inevitably entails adding—the depth of embodied mediation in salvation history, specifically in the Church. The great Marian moment arrived with J. M. Scheeben, who saw in Möhler’s ecclesiology a renewed Mariology. Mary’s motherhood, for Scheeben, was not exclusively her biological maternity, as it was for so many Scholastics and Neo-Scholastics, but became the highest expression of her spousal relation to God. Scheeben writes: “Formally and adequately taken as God’s bridal motherhood, the divine motherhood in its concrete realization also implies the most vivid bridal relation of Mary to God” (221). He took as his own Augustine’s words, “Mary was happier when she conceived with her mind than with her womb ... she carried it more happily in her heart than in her body” (221; Augustine, *Sermo* 215, n. 4; PL 38:1078). While Scheeben established the mysterious balance between Mary as

¹ TD 3.

spouse and Mary as mother in a profound way, the connection between Mary and the Church, however, was only intimated in his writings, but never fully developed. The next most important figure was John Henry Newman, whose recovery of Mary as the Second Eve only further emphasized the importance of understanding Mary, not as a function of Christology and thus as a physio-biological instrument, but as a mystery within salvation history. This tradition of rediscovery found its culmination in the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium*.

Between those figures and the Council stand many theologians, but none as important as Henri de Lubac (1896-1991). His contributions to Mariology and ecclesiology are not only indisputable and influential, particularly at the Second Vatican Council where he served as a theological *peritus*, but more importantly, they still serve as a source of profound renewal and inspiration for many theologians and believers. In this essay, I shall explore Henri de Lubac's insights regarding Mary in six sections: I shall begin by asking where, for Henri de Lubac, is the place of Mariology within the Mystery of Faith. The second section shall ask what is at stake in Mary by looking at the main challenges to Mariology. For Henri de Lubac, to invoke the person of Mary is to bring to memory the entire economy of salvation, and thus to invoke the entire depths of the Christian mystery. As such, what is at stake in Mary is the significance of the economy of embodied-personal mediation and human cooperation in salvation. Henri de Lubac, however, takes this a step further. In the third section, I will consider his narrative of how we lost the conception of embodied-personal mediation and ended up exclusively prioritizing a more abstracting approach. De Lubac identifies the hegemony of dialectic as the culprit, and argues that only a return to symbols and to a thicker conception of salvation history, both of which are the means by which to express mystery in history, can offer us the proper understanding of both Mariology and ecclesiology. The ultimate effect of an exclusively dialectical approach, according to de Lubac, is that it turns Christianity into an ideology, and "ideologies have no need of a mother." Conversely, de Lubac states that only an appeal to Our Lady can heal us of the effects of an exclusively dialectical approach and the loss of a sense of salvation history; in other words, only Mary can free us from Christianity as ideology, and can bring us to see Christianity as God-made-flesh in the world, specifically in the Church.

Changing from his diagnosis of the problematic to his proposed solution, I turn in the fourth section to the way in which de Lubac, following Möhler, considers Mary and the Church as sacraments of Christ. They "effect what they signify" in that as spouse of the Word, they signify Jesus Christ; but as mother of the Word, they make him present. These two aspects of their sacramentality—signifying and effective, spousal and maternal, sanctified and sanctifying, respectively—present a series of "analogies," "parallelisms" and "symbolic overlaps" between Mary and the Church. Early Christians, "those geniuses of ontological symbolism," would present these parallels through a rich array of types, such as the Ark, Temple, the Woman of the Apocalypse, and so forth. But this poses the deeper question of the precise relationship between Mary and the Church. In section five, I outline how de Lubac is clear that the relationship between the two is not "exterior," but "intrinsic and organic." Mary is not only (or merely) the "*typus Ecclesiae*," but she is organically and truly the "Mother of the Church" and its "pre-eminent member." Mary is the beloved Spouse of the Word made flesh, Mother of Christ, and Mother of the Church. And she is this in a unique way. Or, as the Medievals would say it,

“*singularis et unica*,” “*specialiter*,” “*singulariter*,” or “*superexcellenter*,” as contrasted with *in genere* which is used when referring to the Church. In the last and final section, I turn to the most profound aspect of de Lubac’s treatment. For him, the Jesus Christ made present body, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist is no less from Mary’s womb than the Nazarene who conversed with the disciples. As such, de Lubac argues, the Eucharist is not only the “heart of the Church,” but is the ultimate ground for and connection between Mary and the Church.

I. The place of Mary within the Mystery of Faith

In the Eulogy offered by Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) for Hans Urs von Balthasar (1988), he cites a passage from the latter’s meditative work called, *Prayer*, first published in 1955, which captures the key to both of their approaches to the Christian mystery. Balthasar, in this text, is expounding various aspects of the passion narrative:

The implication of the soldiers dicing for the seamless robe is metaphorical: ultimately the indissoluble mystery of the *persona ineffabilis* resists every attempt to dissolve it into aspects (*epinoiai*), to make it more amenable to thought. In his death, the whole Church streams forth with the water and the blood; with all her truths, rites and dogmas she is nothing but an extension of the Lord’s dying, breaking heart, as Origen perhaps understood best.²

The Christian faith is one. The unity of the Christian faith is not like that of an organization or an ideology. The Christian faith is not the collective faith of “individuals who, having believed in Jesus Christ each on his own part and each in his own way, decided to join together in order to organize their belief and their life in common.”³ The Christian faith is one in a much deeper and substantial way, both objectively and subjectively.⁴

Henri de Lubac rightly states that the basis of this unity is best described by John Henry Newman, in his famous university sermon of February 8th 1843:

Creeds and dogmas live in the one idea which they are designed to express, and which alone is substantive; and are necessary only because the human mind cannot reflect upon that idea except piecemeal, cannot use it in its oneness and entirety, nor without resolving it into a series of aspects and relations ... and thus the Catholic dogmas are, after all, but symbols of a Divine fact, which, far from being compassed by those very propositions, would not be exhausted, nor fathomed, by a thousand’ (125).

The entire conspectus of Christian mysteries—all of the “-ologies” neatly and separately cataloged in scholastic and early modern manuals of dogmatic theology—flow out of “the Lord’s dying, breaking heart.”

² Hans Urs Von Balthasar: His Life and Work
edited by David L. Schindle

³ Motherhood of the Church, 15.

⁴ “Whether it is considered in the life of the faithful or in its content, in its subject or in its object, the Christian faith always appears profoundly one.”

For Henri de Lubac, as for Pope Benedict XVI after him, this has deep implications for theological considerations of Mary. Mariology, more so than any other area of inquiry except perhaps ecclesiology, emphasizes the interconnections of the Christian mysteries, since it is the most defining property of Mariology that it can never be exclusively, or even predominately, mariological.⁵ The person, life, and role of Mary can never be of any ultimate significance in itself. To use the words of Benedict XVI, who summarizes de Lubac beautifully on this point:

Briefly put, it says that the salvation brought about by the triune God, the true center of all history, is ‘Christ and the Church’ – Church here meaning the creature’s fusion with its Lord in spousal love, in which its hope for divinization is fulfilled by way of faith. If, therefore, Christ and *ecclesia* are the hermeneutical center of the scriptural narration of the history of God’s saving dealings with man, then and only then is the place fixed where Mary’s motherhood becomes theologically significant as the ultimate personal concretization of the Church.

The early Christians had a deep understanding of this context for understanding Mary’s significance. When Mary pronounces her *Yes* to God, she is Israel in person. The entire spousal relationship between God and his people becomes concretized in her *Fiat*. She is, at that very moment, the Church “in person and as a person.” And for this reason, the entire Church is and always will be Marian.

To say that Mary, like the Church, is a mystery, has certain epistemological and thus procedural ramifications. Mysteries “cannot be taken in with a simple and direct glance but only mirror-like, in our minds. And our minds are confronted with a paradox of a kind that can only be expressed in a series of antithetical, or if you prefer dialectical sentences.” This means that a mystery is a tension which is only resolved in the reality itself, which is always beyond our grasp or comprehension. Thus, we must understand that dialectic is always a pen-ultimate procedure, paradoxically resolved only in the reality itself. The premise behind this procedure rests with the (perichoretic) unity of the Christian mysteries among themselves, as they are all rooted in the *one* mystery of Jesus Christ. Thus, while the perspectives of the mystery under consideration are made clear through a series of dialectically formulated expressions, they always converge in the reality of that mystery, and thus, the tension can never be fully resolved in our minds, but only in the reality. The theological method of the *nexus mysteriorum inter se* in which “‘reason illuminated by faith’ is helped by ‘the connection of mysteries with one another and with man’s last end’” (DS 3016; Vatican I)⁶ finds its *raison d’être* in the conviction that all of the mysteries (plural) of the Christian faith stream forth from the *one* Mystery of the Triune God’s

⁵ Benedict XVI puts it this way: “Mariology cannot be developed from the naked fact, but only from the fact as it is understood in the hermeneutics of faith. In consequence, Mariology can never be purely mariological. Rather, it stands within the totality of the basic Christ-structure and is the most concrete expression of its inner coherence.”

⁶ And, indeed, reason illustrated by faith, when it zealously, piously, and soberly seeks, attains with the help of God some understanding of the mysteries, and that a most profitable one, not only from the analogy of those things which it knows naturally, but also from the connection of the mysteries among themselves and with the last end of man; Chapter 4. *Dei Filius*.

self-revelation and efficacious salvation in Jesus Christ (singular).⁷ As Gregory of Nyssa described so beautifully in his *Life of Moses*, it is the inexhaustibility of God's own life and love that fills every mystery of faith with an infinite wealth – a treasury that can never be fully expended. Henri de Lubac describes Christian theology, not as a straight syllogistic line, but as a circle, around which the theologian moves to consider the different aspects of a single mystery. This means that Marian dogmas which we profess are not “ends in themselves” but are anagogic: they “point” towards a mystery, a reality that far exceeds, but which is expressed in, the dogmatic formulation. They are different aspects (*epinoiai*) of the one mystery of “the Lord's dying, breaking heart.”⁸ For this reason, the Church invokes Mary more under symbols than definitions,⁹ images than concepts,¹⁰ and devotion than theorization.¹¹

It is the perennial Promethean temptation to confuse our (limited) perspective with the (unlimited) reality of a divine mystery, and the result of such a replacement is to create an ideology out of a mystery. We shall see below that this holds true for Mary and the Church. To say, “Mary is ‘nothing other than...’” is a methodological red flag.¹² In such a case, we are fully

⁷ De Lubac writes, “The true tripartite structure of the *Credo* corresponds to the threefold question directed to the one to be baptized about his faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But it is immediately shown that the “*theologia*” (God himself) is and remains accessible only through the “*oikonomia*” (God or us in the life, suffering and death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ); and it belongs to the *oikonomia* that Christ also is accessible in no other way than in and through the Church.”

⁸ We find a series of interdependent unities, grounding one unity within the other: the Church, and all of her teachings and aspects, are one because they derive from the unity of the salvific

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and life. It is therefore the source of all other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental teaching in the ‘hierarchy of the truths of faith’ (GCD 43). The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men ‘and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin’ (GCD 47) (CCC 234)

St. Paul sheds light upon the interdependent mysteries of the Christian faith in his letter to the Ephesians: “strive to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

⁹ De Lubac speaks here regarding the Church, and says elsewhere that whatever is said of the Church, *mutatis mutandis*, can be said of Mary: “From the ‘mystery’ character of the Church we have so far drawn a first consequence: no simple image or concept of the Church wholly succeeds in defining her and the multiplicity of images and concepts offered by Scripture need simultaneous and inclusive treatment, and have been traditionally so treated.”

¹⁰ “Even with scriptural warrant and due correction an image or analogy is always inadequate. All it every does is portray an aspect – of greater or lesser importance – of the mystery and even when freed from error by refinement still does not penetrate to the integral truth. An image is practicable, but even when duly purged of inadequacies its best function is to complete another image – or images. Here, too, revelation is our guide. In describing the Church for us it adds image to image, and Christian tradition has meditated the mystery of the Church by commenting on them. (21).

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¹² Hans Urs von Balthasar writes: “All of the perversions that human freedom can inflict upon being and its qualities always aim at one thing: the annihilation of the depth dimension of being, thanks to which being remains a mystery even, indeed, precisely in its unveiling. The formula ‘A is nothing than ...’ typifies this perversion, whatever the transcendental it affects” (Theo-Logic I, 16).

identifying—equating (which in the case of mysteries, always consists in equivocating)—her with one of the aspects of her reality, expressed dialectically. We can never seek to fully resolve the tensions in our minds; for such a rationalist approach always simultaneously desacralizes and transforms the object of the mystery into an ideological parody (as we shall see below). The distinguishing characteristics of an ideology as opposed to a mystery are: an ideology annihilates the depth dimension of mystery. In ideologies, dialectic is both procedure and ultimate reality; in mysteries, dialectic is a procedure to more clearly express the depths and tensions within a mystery, but which are always paradoxically resolved and converge in the mystery itself.

Henri de Lubac’s brilliant insight is that our regard towards Mary, whether operating intuitively or expressed self-consciously, forms and informs our principal and foundational *Gestalt* within the entire Christian mystery. Even among those who uncloak her of any special prerogatives or devotion, including those who reduce her to nothing but a replaceable instrument for the incarnation – an expendable divine “tool” of sorts, their conception of Christianity, especially of the mystery of the economy of divine mediation, bears the insufferable mark of her absence. In effect, Mary becomes the litmus test for whether or not one has created an ideology or dived into a mystery. Mary encapsulates, and as a Jewish woman, recapitulates, the historical and qualitative point at which God ceases to be merely the transcendent and impersonal God of the Philosophers, and becomes the tri-personal God of history, the God who does not disdain embodiment, but lowers himself into an economy of embodied mediation for us. Thus, if we lose a sense of the importance of the category of *oikonomia*, of the way in which God in himself (*theologia*) is only accessible through God for us (*oikonomia*), then we also lose a sense of the importance of Mary. It is not her prerogatives that grant her a special place in salvation history, but her special place in salvation history that are the basis of her prerogatives.¹³ It is precisely this recourse to salvation history that best preserves Mary from ideological deformation. Since “salvation history” is the term that we give to the historic unity of God’s work of revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ. Thus, we have a *taxis* of mysteries: from mysteries of faith to the one mystery of Christ, from which they all derive and in which they all intersect; from the one mystery of Christ to the unity of divine work and revelation (*oikonomia*), and from the unity of divine work and revelation (*oikonomia*) to the unity of God’s Tri-personal being (*theologia*).

II. Challenges to the Church and to Mary: Human Cooperation and Embodied-Personal Mediation

Mary has been the site of much contention since the Reformation. She embodied, in many a Protestant’s eyes, the twofold sacrilegious usurpation of Christ’s unique mediation and God’s absolute sovereignty. Martin Luther famously states that everything takes place “by the grace of God alone and the sole working of the Holy Spirit, without any human action.” And among many of Luther’s spiritual descendants, we still find such an approach, oftentimes in even greater

¹³ In a sense, we can read Paul’s “grace upon grace” as the ultimately proclamation of what Mary means. She is the fullness of human cooperation with God, which itself presupposes grace, and God’s self-emptying revelation and salvation of humans, which is grace *par excellence*. The intersection of these two in the person and role of Mary perfectly embodies the idea of “grace upon grace.”

dialectical extremes than Luther himself had proposed. De Lubac perceptively writes that “a demand of this kind is ‘more Christian’ in appearance only. In reality, neither the gratuitousness of the divine initiative nor the transcendence of the divine action has anything to suffer from an economy of salvation that was set up by God himself” (314-5). De Lubac realizes that what is at stake here is not simply one’s reading of Mary’s role, but the two intertwined mysteries of human cooperation in redemption and the economy of embodied-personal mediation. It is precisely for this reason, de Lubac notes, that in the course of Christian history, we oftentimes find the same kind of reservations regarding Mary and the Church in certain of the faithful. It is here that Mary and the Church find their conversion in theology: they both play an analogous role in the defense and exposition of the whole Christian mystery insofar as they both delimit the part—subordinate but real and vital—played by human action in redemption and of the embodied-personal modality of divine mediation.

One can see the underlying logic of such a position in Luther, Calvin, or Barth: God’s grace does everything, and the human being nothing. In Luther’s theology, the human being remains a sinner regardless of grace’s work (*Simul justus et peccator*), since God imputes to the believer the merits of Christ.¹⁴ And in the case of Calvin, a person’s salvation or damnation was predestined by the immutable will of God from all of eternity. In Barth, who denies the *analogia entis* (and thus any possibility of a complimentary relationship between nature and grace), grace “remains grace,” and human beings have “not the least control over it” because it is a one-way relationship “without reciprocity” (51). For Barth, “a Catholic understanding of soteriology is synergistic, a cooperation between divine grace and human effort. God in Christ does not save; God in Christ graciously enables and helps us to save ourselves (53).” In their eyes, they are preserving the unique, exclusive mediation of Christ and the absolute sovereignty of God, not only in initiating salvation, but more importantly, in effecting it. From a causal point of view, the human creature has two possible postures: antagonism or receptivity. But the human being can *never* be a cause or bearer of grace, or cooperate with grace, for in such a view the human would become a “secondary subject” and in his or her “merits” can raise a “claim to grace,” which violates not only God’s absolute sovereignty by making his salvific will dependent upon human freedom and Christ’s exclusive and unique mediation, but the very concept of grace as always and at all times gratuitous – “Otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (Rom 11:6b).

Such a view regarding cooperation, in turn, affects their view of the Church. “There have always been visionaries and rebels,” de Lubac observes,

against the burdensome conditions of Catholic unity who have made a distinction between the visible, temporal, hierarchic Church that exists among us and a sort of invisible Church—wholly “interior,” wholly “spiritual,” “the luminous community of God dispersed throughout the universe. In such a view, the title “Church of God” could only be applied, properly speaking, to this vast *communio sanctorum*, the theoretical common ground of all Christian communities and all good men. It alone would be divine; the first Church, the ‘bodily’ church would be a ‘human creation’ (Luther) and no more.

¹⁴ Apology of the Augsburg Confession 2.38-41

In their view, a “bodily” Church which proposes to be an organ of grace would be the same as a human being claiming to have “control” over God: it would entail the idolatrous and promethean attempt at “laying hands on God.” Since the entire initiative and effecting of salvation lays with God, the “Church of God” could only be applied to an abstract, eschatological idea. And any attempt at claiming that some “body,” a Church *in via*, can offer a sacramental economy in which grace is effected, is nothing but a form of Catholic humanism. It is the championing of the human over God. “What else can this doctrine of the self-subsistence of the free creature vis-à-vis God be but the theological form of the deep-rooted human hostility towards God’s grace as such, which we call sin?”¹⁵ Resultantly, for Luther, there is the ‘bodily’ church that is nothing but a ‘human creation,’ and the heavenly church that is divine; in Calvin, the Church is defined (abstractly) as “the contemporary of the faithful whom God has ordained and elected to eternal life.” And in Barth, it is his (famous) doctrine of election that takes the place of the Church.

For Barth, all that is distinctly Catholic is precisely the human being “laying hands on God”: the gracious effect of the sacraments defined as *ex opere operato*, which makes of them ‘an impersonal process, independent of God’s decision and man’s faith’ (KD I, 70); in the doctrine of the ‘indelible character’ of grace and the Pope’s official title of ‘Vicar of Christ,’ which ‘takes away the possibility of grace being removed, and Christ’s own decision disappears in the decisions of this human authority’ (KD I, 100); in the claim of the Church to be the authentic and infallible interpreter of Scripture, which means ‘she surveys the whole from her magisterial heights and thus is no longer subject to the Bible’s dictates’ (KD I, 272). She becomes a self-governing Church, but ‘self-government is a, indeed the, great prerogative of God’ (KD 2, 639). It is thus presumptuous and ‘outright disobedient’ for the creature to assume such a role. Also, the same is the case for the Church’s attempt to tie down revelation in ‘doctrinal decrees’ that try to bind ‘what God has elusively revealed into human images, concepts and judgments with the claim that everything that has been so constrained and conserved must be held as true despite the fact that these revealed truths have also been *hidden*’ (KD 1, 285). In all these issues, one drama keeps playing itself out: the ‘naturalization of grace’ (KD 1, 40), ‘the presupposition that the Church is continually and inherently bound to a creaturely form,’ the transformation of grace into ‘a physical event,’ a ‘reified thing.’ This view of Catholic belief about the Church is anticipated and acutely expressed by none other than Schleiermacher: “The antithesis [between Catholicism and Protestantism] may provisionally be put thus: Protestantism makes the individual’s relation to the Church dependent on his relation to Christ, while Catholicism, contrariwise, makes the individual’s relation to Christ dependent on his relation to the Church.”

According to de Lubac’s observation, such a view regarding human cooperation not only affects the above views regarding the Church, but their regard for the Church becomes concentrated (or concretized) in their regard for Mary. In fact, it is remarkable that here we see the inverse reflection of the Catholic belief that Mary is the “*typus Ecclesiae*” (Ambrose). What is said of the Church at large is applied concretely to Mary. Despite the undeniable beauty of

¹⁵ KD 3, 661. Tr. P. 51.

Luther's commentary on the *Magnificat*, one must note the remarkable lack of agency or freedom allotted to Mary. In accord with his teaching that human beings can do absolutely nothing to cooperate with grace and everything is wholly and exclusively due to God's will and action, Luther stresses repeatedly that Mary has nothing of herself; indeed, she is but "nothingness."¹⁶ According to this reading of Mary, if one were to honor her, one can only say: "O blessed Virgin and Mother of God, how utterly nothing and despised you have been, and yet God has looked upon you so graciously and abundantly and has done great things in you. You have not been worthy of any of these, and the superabundant grace of God is in you far above your merit." (549). Luther famously believed that the "pretended church" had "Mary made a common idol with countless services, celebrations, fasts, hymns, and antiphons" (Luther, "Exhortation to All Clergy," LW, 33.54), since if anyone were to honor her properly, she should "be stripped completely of everything and only regarded in her nothingness, afterwards we should admire the overwhelming grace of God who looks so graciously on such a lowly, worthless human being" (568).

It was largely Calvin who set the standard for the subsequent protestant tradition in a threefold way: he absolutely rejected all forms of Marian piety; he insisted on the clear Christological boundaries within which Mary might be discussed;¹⁷ and he emphatically saw any concession to Mary's causal or personal role as an unforgivable betrayal of God's honor. Calvin's "mariological thought, like all his other views, was determined by his central theological idea of the majesty and glory of God, before which all creaturely being and action has almost no importance whatsoever." "Since everything depends solely on the will of God he rejects even the intercession of the Blessed Virgin." This tradition culminates in Schleiermacher's abrupt and straightforward dismissal of Mary from dogmatic theology altogether.¹⁸ Karl Barth, in Volume I of his *Church Dogmatics* (1932), most explicitly captures not only the dependence of Mariology and Ecclesiology on one's stance regarding human cooperation, but the interrelationship between Mary and the Church:

It is in Marian doctrine and the Marian cult that the heresy of the Roman Catholic Church is apparent—that heresy which enables us to understand all the rest. The 'Mother of God' of Roman Catholic dogma is, quite simply, the principle, prototype, and summing-up of the human creature cooperating in its own salvation by making use of prevenient grace; as such, she is also the principle, prototype, and summing-up of the Church. ... Thus, that Church in which there is a cult of Mary *must* be itself understood as at the [First] Vatican Council; is of necessity that Church of man who, by virtue of grace, cooperates with grace.

Because of these interrelations, Barth is able to say, with his usual degree of vituperation: "Where Mary is 'venerated,' where this whole doctrine with its corresponding devotion is current, there the Church of Christ is not" (CD I/2, 143).

¹⁶ P. 568; 8.

¹⁷ Cf. Tim Perry, Pro Ecclisia 19.1, 49f.

¹⁸ Cf. Tim Perry & Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2nd Ed. Trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 403-5.

III. Human Cooperation and Embodied-Personal Mediation as Preserving the Incarnation

“*Sed contra*,” to use the Thomistic phrase, de Lubac defers to the keen historical insight of John Henry Newman:

if we take a survey at least of Europe, we shall find that it is not those religious communions which are characterized by devotion towards the Blessed Virgin that have ceased to adore her Eternal Son, but those very bodies, (when allowed by the law,) which have renounced devotion to her. The regard for His glory, which was professed in that keen jealousy of her exaltation, has not been supported by the event. They who were accused of worshipping a creature in His stead, still worship Him; their accusers, who hoped to worship Him so purely, they, wherever obstacles to the development of their principles have been removed, have ceased to worship Him altogether.¹⁹

For, de Lubac writes, “In our eyes neither our Lady nor the Church in any way whatsoever replaces the humanity of Christ, as is feared even among those who make the most sincere of efforts to understand the matter. The twofold mystery misunderstood by the Reformation is, on the contrary, the indispensable guarantee of the importance of the Incarnation and, by the same token, bears witness to the divine plan of associating God’s creatures with the work of their own salvation: “For the Lord will give goodness: and our earth shall yield her fruit” (See p. 315).

De Lubac’s most fundamental theological conviction—from which every piece of his entire *oeuvre* derives, especially his Mariology and ecclesiology—can be expressed in three points of “incarnational logic”:

(1) *The Incarnation, from the vantage point of the divine σκοπός, is “the divine mystery of the economy according to man”*: The Triune God, who cannot be known in himself (*theologia, Deus in se*) apart from his self-revelation to us and saving activity in Christ (*oikonomia, Deus pro nobis*), “in a plan of sheer goodness” and love has emptied himself into an “economy,” a “divine economy,” in which to realize his own purpose for the world, the mystery of salvation, on account of our sensible nature, sin, and weakness. De Lubac reminds us of a seemingly-obvious, but all-too-often overlooked point: that, from the perspective of the divine σκοπός, the Incarnation is a condescension to and for us, precisely in our human nature. The Incarnation, in short, is for keeps. It is as indispensable as our human nature. It is not a disposable “husk” once accomplished: Christ, in his humanity and divinity, remains the “Lamb as though slain,” the “high priest,” the “one mediator between God and men,” always. God, thus bodily mediated, is never consequently received unmediated apart from Christ’s body. The body of Christ is, and always remains, what Thomas Aquinas would call the *instrumentum conjunctum*: the very instrument of the divinity for our salvation. This means that the body of the Word is the ultimate sign of God’s self-emptying adaptation to our condition.

¹⁹ Development of Christian Doctrine, 426.

(2) *The Incarnation therefore means an economy of embodied-personal mediation:* The Christian stands in a unique place, straddled between two events: the event of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the event of the consummation of the world. How does the Christian relate to these events and how do these two events relate to one another? How does the soteriological significance of Christ's unique event become accessible to the Christian, thus historically separated? At the heart of these questions is the way in which one interprets "*Christus descendit et ascendit ut impleret omnia*" (Cf. Eph 4:10). How is the unique and particular life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ universalized? It is a tribute to the genius of Henri de Lubac to see in this question the main locus of the divergences in ecclesiology and Mariology. For, according to de Lubac, however one answers this question will determine the rest. De Lubac approvingly notes that the notion of the "concrete universal" was "applied to Christ and to the Virgin Mary by Blondel, Teilhard de Chardin [and] von Balthasar." (3). Broadly speaking, there are three ways of understanding this term. The first is as myth, the second is as ideology, and the third is as mystery.

The first interpretation holds that something is first universal and then is concretised. In such a case, Christ came merely to preach or exemplify a salvation already decreed and achieved eternally, thus making the historical incarnation merely a parable expressing some eternal generation of God in the hearts of human beings. (3) Such is the mythic narrative of a host of Gnostic texts. This not only de-historicizes salvation, it effaces the meaning of Christ's own historicity.

The second interpretation—which is that of the Reformation tradition considered above—attempts to make of the Incarnation a one-time historic event of insurmountable importance, but which is now procedurally surpassed and made accessible through non-historic and non-embodied means: a process of universalizing abstraction. Christ's body, in this reading, served the purpose of his revealing and saving activity in his life, death, and resurrection; but, having accomplished salvation, there is no further need for bodily mediation. God's triumph in the body is accessible thenceforth to the believer across history by faith, since salvation thus achieved is now supra-historical. The emphasis in this reading, therefore, is on the accomplishment of the historic Christ and the unmediated reception of that accomplishment by the believer. And anything that comes between Christ's accomplishment and the believer's unmediated reception is deemed an idolatrous intrusion on Christ's unique mediation and God's absolute sovereignty. The "gap" between the Christ-event and the consummation-event is filled, therefore, through a process of abstraction and application. The theologian abstracts from Christ's particularity and historicity, and vertically applies those abstractions to an eschatologically-collective "idea" of Church which stands above history and the world; and then the believer's own reception of unmediated grace is correlated with that supra-historical and supra-mundane eschatologically-collective "idea" of Church. This creates a dynamic of pure receptivity on the part of the creature, with no need for cooperation (hence, the historic elimination of the process of sanctification from earthly life), since the process is governed by a

dialectic of abstraction that excludes—*de facto* and *de jure*²⁰—any need for continued embodied-personal mediation after the Incarnation-event.

We can see this operative in the way in which these traditions struggle with trying to explain the purpose of the Church in light of their doctrines of Predestination. The result, as mentioned above, is that the theologian's abstracting movement goes from the historic Christ (*concretissimum*; Barth) to a "divine church" (Luther), "the faithful whom God has ordained and elected to eternal life" (Calvin), "the spotless bride of Jesus Christ governed and refreshed by the Spirit of God"²¹ (Zwingli), "the invisible Church," which is "an undivided unity" and "infallible" (Schleiermacher). But this vertical movement from the historic Christ to a supra-temporal, supra-mundane entity bypasses history and embodied-personal mediation. It establishes a direct relationship with the historic Christ and *that* Church. This gives the believer who is historically straddled between the Christ of history and *that* Church, with little to no role, except that of pure receptivity. This strict relationship between Christ and the supra-historic, supra-mundane Church leaves a "remainder": the Church in history. The Church, thus conceived, is extrinsic to the mediation of grace. And if the Church claims to have any mediating power—or, more boldly, as the Catholic Church claims, if it believes itself to be the "sacrament" of Christ (LG 1), that is, the sign and instrument that both bears witness to *and* effects (mediates) Christ's revealing and salvific work in the world—then such a claim would be idolatrous, since it would remove from Christ's unique and exclusive mediation and God's absolute sovereignty. Thus, the role of the Church is defined as offering a qualitative but not historical mediation (Luther²²), "exterior mediation" as opposed to the direct, unmediated "application" of the supra-historic, supra-mundane Church (Calvin), or the bodily and historic Church is given only a role as bearing witness to (in the sense of proclaiming, but not effecting) what Christ has achieved supra-historically (Barth). This leaves the Church of history to be classified as "the bodily Church," which is "a human creation" (Luther), the "Church of the pontiffs" (Zwingli), the "visible Church," which is "a divided church" and "always subject to error"²³ (Schleiermacher). It is this division that has also led to what de Lubac considers the deleterious and infectious

²⁰ The abstracting process does not merely mean that there is no bodily mediation in their conception of the Christian faith; but *in principle*, there cannot be. Only the historic Incarnation has any truly mediating significance, and once that is accomplished, the reception of grace is thereby direct and unmediated.

²¹ Huldreich Zwingli, *Sämtliche Werke* [= Z], vol. I, 538.

²² What I mean by qualitative as opposed to historical mediation is the following: for Luther, it was much more important to be in qualitative continuity with the faith of the Apostles than to be in historic continuity, either by the succession of Bishops or the institution itself. He relegated such an institutional or historic claim of continuity to "human traditions," and saw the only acceptable form of "continuity" as continuing the same faith—however he defined and conceived of such faith—as the Apostles. See P. D. L. Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*, ed. P. Toon (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1981), 13-21. Also, see Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," XII, where he writes, "We do not concede to them that they are the Church, and [in truth] they are not [the Church]; nor will we listen to those things which, under the name of the Church, they enjoin or forbid. For, thank God, [today] a child of seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of the Shepherd. For the children pray thus: I believe in one holy Christian Church. This holiness does not consist in albs, tonsures, long gowns, and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but in the Word of God and true faith." <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/concord/web/smc-02d.html>.

²³ Prop. 149, p. 678. Ff.

division between “religion” (i.e., institution, the Church of history) and “spirituality” or “personal relationship” (i.e., unmediated application via abstraction).

To those who separate the Church thus, de Lubac has no light words:

Yet if you do in fact think in this way — if, like Leibnitz, you dissociate “the temple of God” from “the temple of men” or, like Calvin, you maintain that the Church “is the contemporary of the faithful whom God has ordained and elected to eternal life” and that she can “exist without visible appearance” --- *if you do this, then you are giving a dream the status of an extra-mental entity and trying to separate what God has united*. You are not only opening the door to general doctrinal anarchy, as Melancthon was rapidly obliged to admit and to deplore; *you are shutting out all understanding of the ‘eternal purpose’ that God ‘realized understanding of our ‘eternal purpose’ that God ‘realized in Christ Jesus our Lord’*. *You are denying all Scripture for the sake of human considerations.* (85)

For de Lubac, the personal-embodied mediation of the Word-made-flesh cannot be abstracted from. Christ’s concreteness, bodiliness, and historicity cannot be negated via abstraction, even for the sake of universalization. “The Word of God submitted himself to this essential law: he came to deliver us from time, by means of time – *propter te factus est temporalis, ut tu fias aeternus* [“he was made subject to time on account of you, in order that you might become eternal”]. That is the law of the Incarnation and it must undergo no Docetist mitigation. Following Christ’s example, “loyally and with no cheating,” every Christian must acquire in that state of engagement in time which gives him part and lot in all history, so that his connection with eternity is not unrelated to a past that he knows is immense and a future the length of which is hidden from him.”²⁴

De Lubac is, of course, using the term “Docetist” liberally. In the case of classical Docetism (e.g., Simon Magus, Saturninus, Basilides, Cerinthus, Marcion, Valentinus, Vardanes, etc), the issue in question was the historicity and reality of God-made-flesh, that is, of the Incarnation-event itself. In the case of the Reformers, all of the figures under consideration affirm the Incarnation as a true, real, and historic event. But de Lubac’s claim that if one universalizes the work of the Incarnation by abstracting it from history and embodiment, then one is engaging in a procedural Docetism, albeit at one degree removed from the classical Christological Docetism. (Perhaps we could call this soteriological Docetism, as opposed to Christological Docetism.) For de Lubac, such a means of universalization has the inevitable effect of effacing the Incarnation itself, since it surpasses – albeit procedurally, or soteriologically—the embodiment and historicity of the Incarnate One. And it is on this basis that de Lubac sees such a procedure as leading to an ideology, as opposed to mystery.

Ideologies are abstractions from embodiment, whereas mysteries are transcendental realities that are always encountered in and through the body; ideologies desacralize whatever they encompass, whereas mysteries sacralize everything they touch. Ideologies create collectives and individuals, whose identities are abstractly imputed on the recipient(s); but mysteries give

²⁴ *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, tr. Lancelot Sheppard and Sr Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 145.

birth to persons who, thus born, are free to cooperate in the mystery of their own salvation. Ideologies apply God's grace to "lump sums" in its entranced gaze at an (abstract) eschatological finality; whereas mysteries, realizing that grace is a participation in the inner divine life through the Incarnation, are applied to persons in their specific, incarnate reality.²⁵ And most tellingly, ideologies become universal by negating history and creating pan-historical meaning above the historical; mysteries are made universal by God pouring the full depth of his love so deep into the fabric of history, that it overflows from historic moment to moment, allowing the divine "radiance to penetrate 'to the ends of the earth.'" In short, ideologies effectively deny the incarnation in lieu of a clever gnosis; whereas mystery is its unique preservation and celebration. These distinctions are most important when it comes to Mary and the Church, since they are both the most susceptible to ideological replacement – for only in them, according to de Lubac, is the full realization of the incarnation found.

The third reading of the "concrete universal" derives from the early Church and is held by de Lubac. It coincides with the second approach insofar as it affirms that the historical Incarnation of Christ is the "first act" of the mystery of the Christ-event that is "inscribed-once-for-all [and] dominates the whole of time." But it differs in this crucial respect: universalization cannot be attained via abstraction. "For Christianity is no abstract affair. It is God's own cause in Jesus Christ, who is the most concrete of all. He is so concrete, so unique, so personal and so free that not only can nothing be abstracted from him." In fact, the only form of mediation proper to Christ's uniqueness is one which itself emerges from him: "For Christ has inundated the whole world with holy and divine streams. He waters the thirsty from the divine spring and makes the water flow from the wound which the sword opened in his side. For it is the church which has sprung from Christ's side and turns out to be his bride" (Origen).²⁶ The Fathers of the Church expressed the continuity between God's condescension in adapting to our condition in the Incarnation, on the one hand, and God's continuation of his condescension in adapting to our condition in the sacramental economy of the Church, on the other, by the category of "the divine economy." Thus, Gregory of Nyssa refers to "the divine mystery of the economy according to man," which, he says, expands into "the economy of the Church."

The sacramental economy of the Church, which presupposes human cooperation with grace and the continuation of embodied-personal mediation of God's revealing and salvific activity in the world, is not therefore a replacement of the Incarnation, nor a distraction, but precisely its fulfillment and extension in time. In the famous words of Bossuet, the Church is "Jesus Christ spread abroad and communicated."²⁷ Or, according to Cyril of Alexandria, "the whole mystery is this: the kenosis [of the Lord] and His abasement into the economy of flesh. He bore the form of a servant 'economically' on account of us." We can never lose sight of the divine intention in the Incarnation. The Incarnation is God in a self-willed modality of being completely *for us*, and adapting to our sensible, "mortal vessels," and as such, the continued gift of his *for us* in the

²⁵ Cf. Balthasar, 377-8.

²⁶ The selections are taken from Commentary on the Psalms 77, 31 in Migne, PL 17, 141D and Commentary on Proverbs 13, 16, in Migne, PL 17, 252A, tr. Robert J. Daley, SJ in Hans Urs von Balthasar (ed.), *Origen: Spirit & Fire – A Thematic Anthology of His Writings* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001).

²⁷ Bossuet, *Allocution aux nouvelles catholiques* (Oeuvres oratoires, Lebarcq, t. 6, p. 508).

economy of the Church is not only derivative of the Incarnation itself, but is intrinsic to the intentionality of the Incarnation. As such, the “divine economy,” with its inherent dimension of human cooperation and embodied-personal mediation, is the guarantee of the Incarnation, not its usurpation. It is in this sense that de Lubac, like Möhler, considers the Church as the “Incarnation continued.”²⁸ It is what Augustine called the *totus Christus*.

The Church is straddled between two events: the Incarnation-event as origin and the consummation-event as goal. But *as* a body, the Church perdures between these two events in a supernatural *and* natural aspect, embodying and mediating Christ’s own incarnate form: “the Church is of God (*ex Trinitate*) and she is of men (*ex hominibus*); she is visible and invisible; she is of this earth and this time, and she is eschatological and eternal” (*Paradox of the Church*, 23). And if, after his Resurrection and in his resurrected body, Christ “ascended to the right hand of the Father,” the Church’s bodily journey towards consummation is itself travelling the path “to the right hand of the Father.” The Church’s perdurance as a body is grounded in the fact that eternal Son of God, having taken to himself a human body *truly*, with its historicity and bodiliness, as an adaptation to our condition, continues in a form defined by the Incarnation event itself. God reveals himself to us in our historicity under an historical form. “God acts in history and reveals himself through history. Or rather, God inserts himself in history and so bestows on it a ‘religious consecration’ which compels us to treat it with due respect.” De Lubac grants history a sacramental status: “history is the necessary interpreter between God and man,” for it is the platform in which God condescends to us, and reveals himself to us. De Lubac writes, “For if the salvation offered by God is in fact the salvation of the human race, since this human race lives and develops in time, any account of this salvation will naturally take a historical form – it will be the history of the penetration of humanity by Christ.”

This does not mean that the historical form of the Church as an objective institution that mediates the personal love of Head and members will continue to endure as such for all eternity. But insofar as we are in time, she will endure as such until the end of time. For, the Church’s mode of existence is determined precisely by God’s adaptation *to us* and *for us*. Any negation of this modality via abstraction is to devoid the whole divine gesture of condescension for the sake of adaption. Once the consummation event occurs, and the Body of the Church is transformed by the resurrection into spiritual bodies, the Church will be fully and in her “form” the Bride of the Lamb. At such a point, “the physicality and natural side of grace will no longer have to be conformed to the frailty of these mortal vessels.” But *now*, while we are in history, while we are in time: embodiment and institution are themselves grace: it is the grace of Cross continually pouring itself into the depths of our condition. (Balthasar, KB, 389). Therefore, de Lubac writes,

The mystery of salvation cannot reach us or save us without this final mediation; we have to push to its conclusion the logic of the Incarnation, by which Divinity adapts itself to human weakness. If we are going to have the treasure, then we must also have the ‘earthen vessels’ that contain it (cf. 2 Cor 4:7) and outside of which it evaporates. We have to accept what St. Paul, who knew all about the contrary temptation, called ‘simplicity in Christ’ (2 Cor 11:3). What must be ‘the

²⁸ *Paradox of the Church*, 24.

common people of God' with no reservations made. To put it another way: the necessity of being humble in order to cleave to Christ involves the necessity of being humble in order to seek him in his Church and add 'brotherly love' to the submission of the intellect. (Splendor, 305).

As such, what is deemed in the eyes of a Protestant as the human being's prideful attempt to "lay hold of God" is for Catholics nothing less than God's self-emptying attempt to "lay hold of us." What is more marvelous? A woman who can bear God, or a God who willingly undergoes birth by a woman for us? A priest who can "make" Christ present in the Eucharist, or Jesus Christ who continues to pour himself out for us in the humility of bread and wine through the frail hands of a priest? A man, himself a sinner, who can "absolve" sins, or God who pours the grace of the Cross to us through such an unworthy vessel? And so forth. Human freedom, works, and institution, far from being understood as distractions from or interpolations to the Incarnation, were understood as the "most daring deed, the most breathtaking venture of grace itself." It is only in these forms of embodiment that we see the true depths of God's self-surrender to the world, of his economy *pro nobis*.

(3) *The economy of embodied-personal mediation presupposes that God's grace cooperates with human freedom and preserves nature, even while healing and elevating it.* History is not an impersonal fabric. History is comprised of persons, of freedom: it is the domain of *acta*, which become *facta, gesta*. One of the greatest points of contrast between de Lubac's approach and that of the Reformers is the role allotted to human freedom and created nature. Barth believed that the Catholic understanding of the human being's prevenient cooperation with grace is a form of humanism that champions the human being over God: it is as if God merely helped the human being achieve his or her own salvation. De Lubac affirms, along with M. Clavel, that if such is the meaning of the term, then Catholicism is through and through anti-humanist.²⁹ De Lubac resolutely holds that "No creature can get beyond the boundaries of this earth on its own. There is no available transition from the natural to the supernatural forms of existence.... If there is no path to the supernatural from nature, there is however a way to nature from God's own inner life: that is, the way of God's gracious condescension to us."³⁰

The whole point of de Lubac's extensive writings on nature and grace is that we cannot abstract from Christ ---who is the source and wherewithal of our share in the divine life that *is* grace ---the relationship between the two, but we must encounter them both within the concrete, existential reality of God's work of salvation. This means that the incentive is not to safe-guard the "self-subsistence of the creature vis-à-vis God" (a self-congratulating pat on the back, as Barth would caricature Catholics), but to preserve nature and the free use of human freedom in Christ as a measure of God's condescending love. For de Lubac, there is no relation between nature and grace, or even the possibility of a Christian humanism, apart from the Cross. There is no cosmic or universally-established structure connecting the creature to Creator, made by some

²⁹ Maurice Clavel wrote: 'If humanism is the doctrine of the absolute existence of man, of man alone, to the exclusion of God, then I am anti-humanist,' in M. Clavel, *Dieu est Dieu* (Grasset, 1976), 170. De Lubac writes of this quote: "This every Christian must obviously approve," in *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, 93.

³⁰ Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik II* (Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1949), 191-2.

sort of abstraction, by which each could be measured respectively. God remains God, even in the economy. Thus de Lubac writes:

Humanism is not itself Christian. Christian humanism must be a *converted humanism*. There is no smooth transition from a natural to a supernatural love. To find himself man must lose himself.... If no one may escape from humanity, humanity whole and entire must die to itself in each of its members so as to live transfigured for God. ... Through Christ dying on the Cross, the humanity he bore whole and entire in his own Person renounces itself and dies. But the mystery is deeper still. He who bore all men in himself was deserted by all. The universal Man died alone. This is the consummation of the *Kenosis* and the perfection of sacrifice. This desertion---even an abandonment by the Father---was necessary to bring about reunion. This is the mystery of solitude and the mystery of severance, the only efficacious sign of gathering together and of unity: the sacred blade piercing indeed so deep as to separate soul from spirit, but only that universal life might enter.” (Catholicism, 368).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). The preservation of grace and of human freedom is not an act of human pride; rather, it is showing that the grain of wheat did not merely fall onto the surface, on the side of the road, but truly fell deep into the rich earth, and swelled up from within the ground an inner life beyond possibility and imagination – the very inner life of God. Catholic talk of cooperation, merit, freedom, nature, and so forth, is, in the final analysis, talk about God’s free use of human beings and human realities in Christ. “And God is free enough to use the human condition and the natural world or to endow an analogous form of himself in one of his created creatures.” KB, Balthasar, 387). In this, the God certainly took the narrow path: salvation was not achieved despite human freedom and at the expense of nature, but---and undoubtedly, this is the sword’s true edge, for here we see the true extent of the vulnerability and *kenosis* of God in the world---the Word’s triumph was precisely *in* human freedom (not despite it) and *while* preserving nature: as such, “*Gloria Dei, vivens homo*; but man will attain to life only by means of the *solī Deo Gloria*.” (Cath, 368).

In fact, it is by means of creating an analogous form of himself in human beings that revelation occurs. Revelation is not merely objective: a quality of information otherwise inaccessible to the human mind. It is also subjective in that as God increasingly reveals himself as personal, he creates persons: “God reveals himself to [us] in a more and more sharply contoured personal form, but also one that is more and more mysterious, whose correlative is the increasing personalization of the one who receives his revelation.”(154, MC). We cannot forget this aspect of the *admirabile commercium*: namely, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who alone are persons absolutely and truly, effect persons in their revelation and salvation. God is “[Tri-]Person personifying.” The very possibility of cooperating with grace is itself grace. The condition of the possibility of the “continued Incarnation,” of an economy of embodied-personal mediation, of cooperating with grace, is itself grace - the revealing and saving work of Christ, which offers participation in the inner life of God, and thereby gives birth to persons as loci of

freedom in history. It is for this reason that the history of the Church is a history of freedom.³¹ And it is because human beings are made persons by God - sharers in the inner divine life, that we are able to offer sacrifice to the Father by sharing in the Son's sacrifice:

What is it that the human being offers to God? Nothing other than what stands written in the law: 'My gifts are what I give' (Num 28:2 LXX). It is therefore from what God has given that human being nonetheless make offering to God. What did God give them? Knowledge of himself. What does the human being offer God? His faith and love." (Origen).³² (203 translation).

IV. Marian Convergences – From and To the Pierced Heart of the Incarnate One

For Henri de Lubac, the above three points of "incarnational logic" converge in Mary, and for this reason, with Mary stands or falls the Christian mystery. Mary's place is the promise and guarantee of the Incarnation, not its replacement, nor its distraction. St. John Damascene writes, "The name of the Mother of God alone contains the whole mystery of the economy"³³ There are two truths contained in this sentence: first, it is only when Mary is placed within the purview of the spousal narrative of Christ and the Church—which we call "Salvation History" (*historia salutis*, *Heilsgeschichte*), or more broadly, the "economy of salvation," "the divine *oikonomia*"—that Mary's true significance becomes evident; second, conversely, it is only when we invoke Mary as our mother that we understand the spousal narrative of Christ and the Church correctly.³⁴ This mutual interpenetration and interdependence between Mary and salvation history derives from the two aspects of Mary herself, which cannot be resolved dialectically: she is Virgin Bride and Mother of the Church, the answering Person and the source of the race. Mary's maternity is only significant in light of her spousal relation. She is only virgin Mother because she is first immaculate spouse. In the words of St. Albert the Great:

He came forth like a bridegroom from the bridal chamber of [Mary's] womb (cf. Ps 18:6). When he was born from Mary, he did not violate her as a mother; rather,

³¹ De Lubac writes, "the Christian cannot but find a tremendous reserve of power in the well-known axiom: 'God loves nothing better than the freedom of his Church.' Even with all her ponderous earthly equipment, the Catholic Church is seen, with ever-increasing clarity, to be the one effective guarantee of spiritual liberty. Even here and now she is a power for liberation, in an initial sense at the wholly human level, and as regards the whole mass of men. ... The Church always was and always will be the source of human liberty and the mother of freedom" (Splendor, 171-2).

³² Or in the words of Augustine, "You allow us to pay you more than you demand so as to become our debtor, yet which of us possesses anything that does not already belong to you? *Confessions* I, 4, 4. Or, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* 6.15: "If then your merits are God's gifts, God does not crown your merits as your merits, but as His gifts."

³³ St. John Damascene, *The Orthodox Faith*, bk 3, chap. 12, PG94, 1029c.

³⁴ We cannot understand "*ex Maria Virgine*" without understanding the full context of "*Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis. Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est*"; and conversely, we cannot understand "*Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis. Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est*" without understanding "*ex Maria Virgine*."

he loved her as a bride, consecrating her as a bride without spot or wrinkle (*In Lucam* 1, 35; ed. Borgnet, 22:103-4), tr. – p. 227).

It is her spousal relation to the God of Israel that brings her into the broader narrative—the scriptural narrative, the *regula fidei*, that is, the Mystery of the Economy of Salvation—in which her maternity can properly be seen and from which it receives all of its significance.³⁵ As the Latin tradition of commentary on the *Song of Songs* has known intimately, the beloved Spouse who is awaiting the “kisses of his mouth” (1:2) is first and foremost the Virgin, in whose womb, as in a bridal chamber, the Word was united with human nature – “the first kiss of the Word, which is the pledge of the final union.”³⁶

In order to understand how Mary is the convergence of de Lubac’s three points of “Incarnational logic,” we must first realize that the tradition refers to two moments as the wedding of the Bridegroom and the Church: that of Christ’s Incarnation in Mary’s womb and when he is pierced on the Cross. And in those theologians who reflect upon the relationship between these two moments, they are oftentimes distinguished as marriage and consummation, respectively. There is a mystical relationship between these two moments, both of which converge in Marian doctrine and dogma. We shall see that if Mary is truly a mystery of the Christian faith, then all that we believe and say about her must converge in the pierced heart of Christ, from which flows out all that the Church believes and all that the Church is. And, if Mary as a mystery should remain true to herself, then she must always give way and point to that pierced heart from which she derives all significance and meaning. This circularity from and to Christ’s side stands at the heart of Marian doctrine and dogma: and for this reason Mary, above all other mysteries, preserves the historical and embodied form of the Incarnate One.

We shall begin our exposition of Mary with this pierced heart and show how from there, Mary became immaculate Spouse. As Spouse, she embodied fully the Church in person and as person, and she also shows the very form of God’s salvific work in cooperating with human freedom. Second, we shall show how Mary, thus sanctified and freed to offer a total *Yes* to God, became the Mother of God when God emptied himself into her womb. She embodied, therefore, not only the Church, who receives Christ as spouse and births him in the world, but also Creation, who receives into its depth the dead grain. This takes us then to the key moment in Mary’s life: Christ’s “hour” becomes also her “hour.” The very body of the earthly Christ which she contained in her womb already contained in it all human beings and his whole mystical body by anticipation; she was already the mother of the collective Christ as such. But when Christ, on the Cross, handed her to John as mother, he revealed to her (and us) the true depths of “the divine economy according to man.” When Christ died, from his pierced side “the economy according to man” became “the economy of the Church,” and with it, correspondingly, Mary, the Immaculate Spouse and Virgin Mother of God became the Mother of the Church.

³⁵ For de Lubac, the three terms, virgin—spouse—mother hold the key to understanding not only Mary, but the Church and every Christian soul.

³⁶ Splendor, 366; Rupert of Deutz’s commentary, *In Cantica canticorum de Incarnatione Domini*; and the opening of Bk I (PL 168, 839-40).

Given that this is the *transitus* point that demarcates de Lubac's reading of Christ as the *universale concretum*, it is for this reason that de Lubac claims that only by invoking Mary as our Mother can we refrain from making Christ into an abstraction and Christianity into an ideology. For, Mary, as our and his mother, remains the *sacramentum Christi*, and only as such, do we retain Christ's historical and embodied form. This then brings us to consider the Church which has as its foundation this Marian experience. The Church is considered from the two Marian aspects of immaculate spouse and virgin mother.

(1) *From the pierced heart of Christ to Mary as immaculate Spouse:*

When the Church professes that "the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, was preserved immaculate of original sin" (Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, December 8, 1854), it means among other things that Mary is among the redeemed and sanctified; that by a special and unique act of God, she is the first Spouse to flow out of Christ's side on the Cross.³⁷ The condition for cooperating with grace is itself grace. Before Mary could be Mother to the Incarnate One, she had to share in his Cross.

She, like all the rest of us, is one of the vast family of the redeemed and that all her greatness comes to her---as greatness comes to all men---from 'the redemption which is in Christ Jesus' (Rom 3:24). As far as she is concerned 'there is no less a need of salvation and grace than there is in all there is in all the rest of us' (Boyer); she is in need, like all the rest of us. ... Our Savior is her Savior too; 'Christ,' writes Arnold of Bonneval, 'included his Mother herself among the others for whom he offered to the Father the sacrifice of his blood.' [For] her privilege was not come by ... the effect of a decree that lies outside the dimension of Redemption. SC 334-5). But although she is redeemed like ourselves, she is redeemed in a manner altogether different – 'redeemed by a more singular salvation' (Pseudo-Augustine) and 'in a way more sublime' (Pius IX). 'She was included, together with the whole race, in Adam's sentence; ... she incurred his debt, as we do; but ... for the sake of Him who was to redeem her and us upon the Cross, to her the debt was remitted by anticipation' (Newman).

Mary's uniqueness does not stem from any prerogative that is hers apart from Christ; but rather, in the unique and intimate way in which she, as a creature, relates to Christ.

Mary's spousal role casts a new light on Barth's insight regarding Catholicism, namely that Mary is the "principal, prototype, and summing-up of the human creature cooperating in its own salvation by making use of prevenient grace," with which, de Lubac states, we must wholeheartedly agree, albeit with a different evaluation and meaning. When the Church professes that Mary was conceived immaculately, it does not mean that God brought about her immaculate conception only because it was "fitting" (*convenientia*) for her as the Mother of God, as the Neo-scholastics would argue (Cf. Suarez *et alia*). Such an approach suffers from a milder

³⁷ "But as that physical body of Jesus was crucified and buried and then raised up, so the whole body of Christ's saints is crucified with Christ..." (Origen).

form of the dialectical isolation of her spousal role from her maternal role that we see in the Reformers. Mary was conceived immaculately so that she would be free (from the bondage of sin) to offer a total *Yes* to God (Rahner *et alia*), and so that in Mary, God can raise up for himself from the intimate depths of creation a beloved spouse, whose purity and beauty would lure Him to union (de Lubac, de Chardin, Sheen, Balthasar, *et alia*). The logic of the Immaculate Conception is something like this: the condition for Christ's pierced heart is Christ's incarnation in Mary's womb; the condition for Christ's Incarnation in her womb is her total *Yes* to God; the condition for her absolute and total *Yes* to God is her freedom from sin; and the condition for her freedom from sin is a unique act of grace by which God applies to her the merits of Christ anticipatingly; the condition for a unique act of grace by which God applies to her the merits of Christ anticipatingly is Christ's pierced heart. Here we arrive at a point of circularity in which one could say that Mary, as *immaculate spouse*, flows out of Christ's side, in order that, Christ, being born of her as Virgin Mother, may be pierced for us and her. In this, God took the narrow path. He entrusted himself to human freedom, albeit one that was already freed by his Cross; and the triumph of the Word was not *despite* human freedom, but precisely *in* it – corresponding to de Lubac's third point of Incarnational logic. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception therefore is a doctrine of God's intimacy and vulnerability.

God's spousal love is not mechanical; nor is it impersonal. God does not love a "collective" and "impersonal" Christianity; nor does God love faceless individuals, who, when added together, constitute Christianity. Both of these approaches are ideological deformations and abstractions. God's love gives birth to persons, and it is persons that are the recipient of God's love. Only persons can be free, and only persons can be called to a spousal relation with the eternal-Person of the Word. De Lubac points to three aspects of Mary's *fiat* that have been all-too-often neglected in the tradition, especially after the eleventh century, which eventually led to this kind of "mis-understanding" among the Reformers: Mary spouse, Mary as person, and Mary as demarcating a history of freedom. Mary's *Yes* to God initiates, from the human side, a history of receiving and living God's freedom. Mary's *Yes* shows how, as God reveals himself in the *person* of the Word, he gives birth to persons as the correlative effect of his self-revelation. In the logic of the incarnation, God did not "forcefully" initiate a history of freedom. Newman notes that the early Fathers "do not speak of the Blessed Virgin merely as the physical instrument of our Lord's taking flesh, but as an intelligent, responsible cause of it" (SC, 314). For this reason, de Lubac writes, "Catholic faith regarding our Lady sums up symbolically, in its special case, the doctrine of human cooperation in the Redemption and thus provides the synthesis, or matrix concept, of the dogma of the Church."

When we consider Mary as the first immaculate spouse that flowed out of Christ's side, we find embodied, in its entirety, the Church in one person. The only point in all of history in which the entire Church was unified and gathered as one, and its essence corresponded fully to its existence, was in the person of our Lady. In fact, it is for this reason, de Lubac argues, that the Church is a "she." The Church is wholly personal, because Mary is person; and Mary is person in her relation to the person of the Word, her spouse and son. Thus, Mary's life offers the Church her "form," her intrinsic mode of existence. The Church is not an extrinsic parallel or analogy. The relationship between Mary and the Church are "not only numerous and close; they are

essential and woven within.” “We might say that they are ‘one single and unique mystery’ (Ruperto Maria of Manresa).” Thus, de Lubac writes:

when Mary was presented in the Temple as a young child, her total self-offering to God was an offering of the Church too; and when the Word, becoming flesh in her womb, poured out all his treasures upon her, he was already wedding and endowing his church in the person of his Mother (Thomas Gallus). Mary’s *fiat* was an acceptance of the full realization of promises on her own account but also for all – collectively --- and that *fiat* was awaited as coming from all (Thomas Aquinas, ST III, q. 30, a. 1; Roysbroeck). And when she exulted in her joy before Elizabeth, it was again in the name of the whole church that she cried out prophetically: ‘My soul hath magnified the Lord’ (Irenaeus). When he placed her newborn child in the arms of old Simeon, the gesture was also the beginning of the Church’s offering to the Father of our sacrifice for our sins. And when she looked on the Son in Nazareth and worshipped him in silence, she was anticipating the worship he was to receive from all the saints to come and thus held the place of the whole Church, which she represented before him (Ambrose Autpert; Guerricus). When, as the ‘silent Mother of the silent Word’ (Santeuil; Rupert of Deutz), she held blindly to the mysteries of God, watching all things and keeping them and pondering them in her heart, she prefigured that long train of memory and intense meditation which is the very soul of the tradition of the Church. And finally, on Calvary, through the three long hours, she received from her Son the definitive teaching—a teaching not of words but of act, through which all words are illuminated. In the name of the whole Church and on behalf of every generation of Christians, she contemplated that Cross which is the principle of all understanding.... And at the same time as she fulfilled in herself the prophecy of Simeon, ‘involved in the whole of the mystery’ (Bossuet) that was consummated by the death of Christ, she also inaugurated that perpetual com-passion of the Church who will remain pierced with a sword until the end of time (Bede the Venerable).

(2) *Mary as Immaculate Spouse to Mary as Virgin Mother of God:*

If Mary as immaculate Spouse embodies the Church “as person” and “in person,” then it is also true that she embodies creation “as person” and “in person.” She is that part of Creation which is receptive to God, and in which the grain truly was planted. For, the very Spirit that came upon her is none other than the Spirit which Christ, in the cry of forsakenness on the Cross, gave up to the Father and the world, and which, poured out from his dead body, is renewing the face of the earth.³⁸ Thus, “the grain of wheat does not remain alone, for it includes the maternal mystery of the soil—Mary, the holy soil of the Church, as the Fathers so wonderfully call her, is an essential part of Christ. The mystery of Mary means precisely that God’s Word did not remain

³⁸ Cf. Balthasar, KB, 389.

alone; rather, it assimilated the other—the soil—into itself, became man in the “soil” of his Mother, and then, fused with the soil of the whole of humanity, returned to God in a new form” (Benedict XVI).³⁹

“God,” writes St. Irenaeus, “in the beginning of time plants the vine of the human race; he loved this human race and purposed to pour out his Spirit upon it and to give it the adoption of sons.” (*Adv. Haer.*, passim. Cyril of Alexandria *In Joannem*, lib. 11, c. 11 (PL 74, 561). The Spousal narrative in which Mary has her unique place begins with God’s love for his creation. When Augustine offers his famous history of the *City of God* in books 15-18, he begins not with Christ, but with Abel the Just. This means that in Mary’s womb, the Word was not wed to a particular man (as Nestorius would have it), but to human nature (as a whole) and all of creation:

Christ from the very first moment of his existence virtually bears all men within himself – *erat in Christo Jesu omnis homo*. For the Word did not merely take a human body; his Incarnation was not a simple *corporatio*, but, as St Hilary says, a *concorporatio*. He incorporated himself in our humanity, and incorporated it in himself. *Universitatis nostrae caro est factus*. In making a human nature, it is *human nature* that he united to himself, that he enclosed in himself, and it is the latter, whole and entire, that in some sort he uses as a body. *Naturam in se universae carnis adsumpsit*. Whole and entire he will bear it then to Calvary, whole and entire he will raise it from the dead, whole and entire he will save it. Christ the Redeemer does not offer salvation merely to each one; he effects it, he is himself the salvation of the whole, and for each one salvation consists in a personal ratification of his original ‘belonging’ to Christ, so that he be not cast out, cut off from this Whole. (*Catholicism*, 37-9).

What this means is that Mary, when understood *from the perspective of the scope of God’s work effected in her*, is “the quintessence of creatureliness, of the world” (REF). If in her, the Word was wed to all of creation, then she must stand for all of creation; if in her, the Word was wed to all of humanity, then she must stand for all of humanity. She embodies the fundamental characteristic of creation, awaiting fertilization by God, awaiting what de Lubac calls the *Donum Perfectum*, or “the second gift,” the first gift being that of creation itself.⁴⁰ Mary embodies God’s love for his creation. “If Mary is ... ‘the Pearl of the Cosmos’ and ‘the link with the incarnate personal Absolute,’ she is in consequence very much an element of the cosmos” (EF 128). And as a specific woman, willingly fertilized under the shadow of the Holy Spirit, Mary embodies that part of creation which has been willingly fertilized by the Holy Spirit, namely the Church.⁴¹

³⁹ Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal (2011-01-12). *Mary: The Church at The Source* (p. 14). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

I kiss the soil as if I placed a kiss on the hands of a mother, for the homeland is our earthly mother. I consider it my duty to be with my compatriots in this sublime and difficult moment.
Pope John Paul II

⁴⁰ McPartlan.

⁴¹ McPartlan.

In the economy of salvation, Mary is the mother of God only because she is beloved spouse; *mutatis mutandis*, in the economy of creation, she is the source of the race only because she is the answering Person. Her *Yes* to God was the fulfillment, not only of Israel's longing for God, but it was also the long-awaited answer to creation's "groaning" (Rom 8:22). It is here that we see de Lubac's contribution regarding the divisions and orders of nature and grace bear Marian fruit: Creation's *desiderium naturale* is now personified and made concrete in Mary who stands for all of creation. Mary—and therefore also the Church—is not only the sacrament of Christ, that is, the instrument and sign that makes him present and becomes truly herself as she points to Him, but truly, she is the "sacrament of the world," or more felicitously, "the sacrament of Christ for the world," in (and *only* in, pace Schillebeeckx⁴²) the sense of embodying both, the heights of a theophanic universe that always "proclaims the work of the Lord" (Newman) and the sign of God's salvific work for all of creation. To pray with Mary is to pray "*ut (Ecclesia) fiat mundo salutis sacramentum*" (Balthasar), since Mary is—"in person and as person" (Benedict XVI)—"*mundus reconciliatus Ecclesia*" (Augustine).

In his *The Eternal Feminine*, De Lubac quotes Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's poem on the Virgin, spoken from her mouth to her devotees:

Long before I drew you, I drew God towards me.
 Long before man had measured the extent of my power,
 And divined the polarity of my attraction, the Lord had conceived me,
 whole and entire, in his wisdom, and I had won his heart.
 Without the lure of my purity, think you, would God ever have come
 down, as flesh, to dwell in his creation?
 Only love has the power to move being.
 If God, then, was able to emerge from himself, he had first to lay a
 pathway of desire before his feet, he had to spread before him a sweet savour of
 beauty.
 It was then that he caused me to rise up, a luminous mist hanging over the
 abyss – between the earth and himself – that, in me, he might dwell among you.
 Now do you understand the secret of the emotion that possess you when I
 come near?

Of course, this does not infringe upon divine freedom; nothing can necessitate God. But God willingly enters into an economy (*oikonomia*, *dispensatio*) of spousal relations: God raises up for himself a beautiful, immaculate bride, whose beauty and love would lure him to condescend (ἐκένωσεν, *exinanivit*) to his wedding chamber in the Virgin's womb. When, in the mystery of the Incarnation, 'the heavenly King celebrated the wedding of his Son, giving him the Holy Church as his companion, Mary's womb was the bridal bed for this royal Spouse' (Gregory the Great). Her immaculate and luring beauty is an inverse reflection of God's self-emptying, spousal love. And her freedom to say *Yes* to God not only makes her the pinnacle of creation's receptivity to God, but also makes her able to truly love, and thus, to personally become the

⁴² See de Lubac's prolonged issue with Schillebeeckx's use of this phrase in *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, 191-234.

Bride of the Word. For that freedom itself is the touch of God's love: it is the first "kiss" of the Bridegroom.

The fact that the Word, like a seed, assimilates the soil into himself can be seen from the opposite, more-explicitly Incarnational angle (connecting the third and first points of de Lubac's Incarnational logic): the very act of the seed's self-planting into the depths of the soil is a condescension for the sake of the soil's transformation. This analogy reveals to us that it is in seeing Mary as standing for Creation and thus also the Church we can see the depths of God's self-emptying in the "divine economy according to man." The Word adapted to our human condition, and truly took that human condition into himself and transfigured it as he handed it to the Father. This adaptation is the greatest measure of the divine mercy. For, that adaptation itself is rooted in the Father's own suffering, in which the Father, giving all that He is and all that He has to the Son (for in God, being and having are one), entrusts the Son with the entire responsibility for the world's salvation (Cf. John 5:22-30).

He came down to earth out of compassion for the human race, feeling our sufferings even before he suffered on the cross and decided to assume our flesh. For if he had not suffered, he would not have come to live on the level of human life. First he suffered, then descended and became visible. What is this suffering which he suffered for us? It is the suffering of love. And also the Father himself, the God of all 'slow to anger and abounding in mercy' (Cf. Ps 103:8) and compassionate, does he not in some way suffer? Don't you know when he directs human affairs he suffers human suffering? For 'the Lord your God bore your ways as a man bears his son' (Cf. Deut 1:31). Therefore God bears our ways just as the Son of God bears our sufferings. The very Father is not without suffering.

As such, the act of condescending adaptation—that is, the very *body* of the Word that comes from the seed (Word) assimilating the soil (Mary, and thus, human nature and creation) to himself—embodies the very love of the Father for the world. To invoke Mary as beloved Spouse and Virgin Mother, in whom the Word emptied himself, is to profess *par excellence* the divine mercy.

(3) The "hour" of the Son and the "hour" of Our Lady – the Immaculate Spouse and Virgin Mother of God becomes the Mother of the Church:

When Mary stood at the foot of the Cross, her identity was revealed to her (and us). She arrived at that place from which her special grace derived, except now, the ultimate reason for that initial "prevenient" grace was to be fulfilled and revealed: what flowed from Christ's side was the Church, in its fullness, the very purpose of the Incarnation; and at that very moment, Mary became not only the mother of the earthly Christ, but mother of the *totus Christus*, the Church. In the words of Origen,

For if Mary had no son except Jesus ... and Jesus says to his mother, 'Behold your son,' and not, 'Behold, this man also is your son,' he said equally, 'Behold, this is Jesus whom you bore.' For indeed everyone who has been perfected 'no

longer lives, but Christ lives in him,' and since 'Christ lives' in him, it is said of him to Mary, 'Behold your son,' the Christ.

(Commentary on John, I.23; p. 38.)

This means that her motherhood is not fully comprehensible – her hour too had not come – until she is able to be invoked as Mother by all of us beloved disciples, sons of the Church because we have her as Mother. From that very moment forth, Mary is not only immaculate Spouse and Virgin Mother of God, but also, Mother of the Church. If, by Mary being immaculate Spouse, she stood for the whole Church as spouse; then by Mary being the Virgin Mother of Christ, she had, within her, the entirety of the collective Christ. As Immaculate Spouse, she was then able to give her *Fiat*, and to become wed to the Word in her womb, thereby truly becoming both immaculate spouse and Virgin Mother. She gave birth to the earthly Christ, in whose body was contained already, by anticipation, all of its members, the whole race in that he took all of human nature into himself, and the entirety of creation. “She bore One according to flesh, but spiritually she bore the whole human race” (Bonaventure) [p. 330]. At that moment on the Cross, when the Church received its birth, Mary became not only in anticipation but in fact, the Mother of the Church.

De Lubac makes the claim that to invoke Mary as Mother of the Church is the only way to correctly understand Christ as the *universale concretum*. Mary as Mother of the Church guards against procedural Docetism, in which the Incarnation event is universalized via abstraction. Let us consider each of these a bit further.

(A) *Mary as Mother of God*: First, to invoke Mary as Mother of God is the only way to correctly understand Christ as the *universale concretum* as regards the Incarnation event itself.

In one sense, even the Reformers agreed to this, although their suspicion of the devotion accompanying the term “Mother of God” (*Mater Dei*, *Deipara*, *Theotokos*), led them to posit its strictly Christological use. Thus, Luther asks “the tender Mother of God” to help him obtain the right spirit to expound the Canticle (p. 545); and Calvin, rejecting Marian devotion accepted a strict Christological usage of the divine motherhood in his *Institutes*. (*Institutes*, 34 (op. 45, 35). And Melancthon, while affirming Mary’s divine motherhood, shows its exclusively Christological function: “Even though the Mother of God prays for the churches, this is too much that she should overcome death and protect us from the great power of Satan. For why should Christ be needed, if Mary could do this?”⁴³ At the hands of the Reformed traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the term itself became obsolete as the Christ of history increasingly became dialectically differentiated from the Christ of faith; and thus, the Marian dimension, which safeguarded their connection, lost currency. It is a tribute to Barth’s own historical acumen that he reclaimed the term (though not its original meaning) for the Reformed tradition: “it amounts to a test of the proper understanding of the incarnate Word, that as Christians and theologians we do not reject the description of Mary as the ‘mother of God,’ but in spite of its being overloaded by the so-called Mariology of the Roman Catholic Church, we

⁴³ T. Kolbe, *Die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (1912), p. 227.

affirm and appropriate of it as a legitimate development of Christological truth” (CD I/2, 138; see also CD IV/2, 71).

In the early Church, propositions about Mary became necessary functions of Christology and developed as part of the structure of Christology, notably in the third and fourth centuries. The debate between Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius marked a watershed moment in the development of Marian teachings and devotion. From this point on, one tradition of Marian confession functioned as a safeguard for Christological orthodoxy, as distinct from the more primordial and pervasive tradition of Marian confession under the guise of ecclesiology, so prominent in the early Church. In the early Church, to confess Mary as Mother of God did not merely affirm the Word’s true humanity (though it did this too), but it also affirmed (albeit tacitly) the way in which one cannot abstract (and thus abnegate) the historicity and bodiliness of the Word. That is to say, the structure of Christ’s own historicity is the “form” of his mediation; and if Christ’s condescension came *through* Mary, Christ’s “form” remains as the Incarnate-One through Mary. Christ is *forever* from Mary’s womb. For the form of the Incarnate One is itself the form of the divine mercy in history. To say to the contrary, or to dispose of Mary, is to turn him into an abstraction, albeit only slightly. The dispensability of Mary rests with the presupposition that Christ can be abstracted from his concreteness, and thus from Mary, through whom he was made concrete, in body and history. And this takes us at the end to Mary’s ultimate role: to confess the full meaning of Mary as the Mother of God is to say that she is (and remains!) the “sacrament of Christ” – the one whose significance resides in pointing to and making present the Word made flesh. By professing Mary as the sacrament of Christ, we are not only safeguarding the once-upon-a-time humanity of Christ, but the unsurpassable mediation of Christ’s body.

One could sum up de Lubac’s insight with the following proposition: Christ is *universale concretum* only if Mary is *sacramentum Christi*. To invoke Mary as sacrament of Christ preserves the historical form and bodiliness of the Incarnate One. It realizes that Christ, in his universalization, cannot be abstracted from his own terms of condescension; but rather, truly brings those to the Father with him. In fact, Mary as *sacramentum Christi* stands at the heart of the entire Catholic understanding of the economy of embodied-personal mediation. As immaculate Spouse, she signifies the Bridegroom (but precisely as spouse, she preserves the otherness between signifier and signified); and as Virgin Mother, she effects what she signifies. Mary is, in the most concrete way, the basis for every case of *ex opere operato*. There are two sides to Mary as sacrament of Christ from which derives her two aspects of immaculate spouse and virgin mother, accordingly:

Since, on the one hand, it is the sign of something else, it must be passed through, and this not in part but wholly. Signs are not things to be stopped at, for they are, in themselves, valueless; by definition a sign is something translucent, which dissolves from before the face of what it manifests—like words, which would be nothing if they did not lead straight on to ideas. Under this aspect it is not something intermediate but something mediatory; it does not isolate, one from

another, the two terms it is meant to link. It does not put a distance between them; on the contrary, it unites them by making present that which it evokes.

On the other hand, sacramental reality is not just any sign, which is provisional and can be changed at will. It is essentially related to our present condition, which is not one embodied in the epoch of figures pure and simple, nor yet one that includes the full possession of the 'truth.' The second aspect of its twofold characteristic, which is not to be dissociation from the first, thus consists in this: that it can never be discarded as something that has outlived its usefulness. We never come to the end of passing through this translucent medium, which we must, nevertheless, always pass through and that completely. It is always through it that we reach what it signifies; it can never be superseded, and its bounds cannot be broken."

The early Church described Mary, as it did the Church, as the *Luna*, the moon, that illuminates a world in darkness by making present the light of the Sun. The naked Word of God is too bright to look at directly, so we see His reflection in the moon, as it lights up the whole world and makes the light present to us. But in this analogy we also see the main function of Mary: "an ecclesial piety cannot stop with Mary; if this devotion is truly ecclesial, and if it is genuinely Marian, it immediately and necessarily leads through Mary to Jesus and, through him, back to the Father in the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴

STOP

This taxis is rooted in the form of the Incarnation itself. "In Christ also we find this twofold characteristic. 'If you had known me, you would without doubt have known my Father also. ... Philip, he that seeth me seeth the Father also.' Nobody, even at the highest peak of the spiritual life, will attain a knowledge of the Father that will dispense him, from that point onwards, from going through him who, always and for all, be 'the Way' and 'the Image of the invisible God.'" And the same holds true for Mary. "Her whole end is to show us Christ, lead us to him, and communicate his grace to us; to put it in a nutshell, she exists solely to put us into relation with him. She alone can do that, she exists solely to put us into relation with him. She alone can do that, and it is a task she never completes; there will never come a moment, either in the life of the individual or in the life of the race, in which her role ought to come to an end or even could come to an end."

⁴⁴ Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal (2011-01-12). *Mary: The Church at The Source* (p. 111). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

(B) Mary as Mother of the Church

“As with Mary, so also with the Church” – Ivo of Chartres, *De nat. Domini* (PL 163, 570c).

And the same holds good for the Church. If the world lost the Church, it would lose the Redemption too.” (203).

To invoke Mary as the sacrament of Christ has two meanings:

Here we can distinguish between two “functions” or “scopes” for the term Mother of God: the one posits Christ as Incarnate but does not include the conditions or terms of the Incarnation itself into the Incarnation event – it abstracts from the Incarnation event certain factors, leaving others. The other

De Lubac notes that both of these traditions flourished without the need to dialectically choose between them. Mary was Virgin Mother, because she was immaculate Spouse; and she was immaculate Spouse, in order to be Virgin Mother. There was a perichoretic relation between these sides that coincided in the pierced heart of the Incarnate One.

De Lubac observes, however, that the eleventh century represented a momentous change in theology – no, in fact, in the course of human thought as a whole! He writes that the

To confess Mary aright is to confess the proper doctrine of the Incarnation. Thus, for example, Thomas Aquinas treats of Mary in the section of his *Summa* on the entry of the Son of God into the world (cf. ST III, q. 27-30). In this mode, Mary’s spousal relation to the Word, so prominent in the early Church, is largely, if not entirely, subordinated to Mary’s role in the incarnation as

the Mother of God. Her primary function, then, is as the guarantor of the Word's true humanity. This treatment of Mary, while it largely informed and formed the subsequent treatments, did not constitute a Mariology proper, but an extension of Christology.

According to de Lubac, if Christ's incarnation is not to be disposed of or subject to a Docetist mitigation, then one thing is certain:

As such, the Church *must* be Marian. Mary is the principle of embodiment and historicity, and she alone safeguards us from turning Christianity into an ideology.

Mary's *Fiat* embodies the very meaning of *ex opere operato*.

For de Lubac, Mary as Mother of God means that Christ is *universale concretum* (as regards the Incarnation event itself) only if Mary is *sacramentum Christi*. And, Mary as Mother of the Church means that Christ is only *universale concretum* (as regards the universalization of the Incarnation event) if Mary and the Church are *sacramenta Christi*.

Sacramentum Christi.

Solus vere universale concretum, si Maria sacramentum Christi est.

To invoke Mary as Mother, then, is the only way to correctly understand Christ as the *universale concretum*. The reason for this is because Mary is the only guarantee that we do not make Christ into an abstraction, and resultantly, make an ideology out of Christianity. But this is true in two ways.

To invoke Mary as the Virgin Mother of God protects against denying the incarnation event itself; to invoke Mary as the Mother of the Church protects against denying the incarnation continued.

Furthermore, to dispense of Mary is to do away with that very moment in which the "divine economy according to man" transitions into the "economy of the Church" – at the foot of

the Cross, when we receive Mary as our mother. De Lubac shares a very important insight from Karl Rahner:

I asked Father Rahner how he explained the decrease of Marian piety in the Church. His reply is worthy of attention. ‘Too many Christians,’ he said to me, ‘whatever their religious obedience, have a tendency to make an ideology, an abstraction, out of Christianity. And abstractions have no need of a mother.’ Here again, what is said of Mary, applies to the Church. The motherhood of the Church no longer means anything to our systems – but we, in order to free ourselves from their abstraction, need to return to our mother.

For de Lubac, Mary as Mother of God means that Christ is *universale concretum* (as regards the Incarnation event itself) only if Mary is *sacramentum Christi*. And, Mary as Mother of the Church means that Christ is only *universale concretum* (as regards the universalization of the Incarnation event) if Mary and the Church are *sacramenta Christi*.

Christ is only truly *universale concretum* if Mary, and thus also the Church, is *sacramentum Christi*.

We must always keep in mind, though, that this image does not make sense by itself, that Mary is not a revamped pagan tutelary goddess. Rather, she speaks her perfect ecclesial Yes to the person and work of her Son, who himself cannot be understood except as one of the divine Trinity

Ecclesiological Transitus: Our Lady and the Birth of the Church

Mary becomes “*typus Ecclesiae*,” “*forma Ecclesiae*,” and “*Mater Ecclesiae*”

If the Church is the body of Christ, it is also the Bride of Christ. These two categories present us with the mystery of the unity-in-difference between Christ and the Church. We become “one” with Christ, in the way that Spouses become irrevocably “one flesh,” but we still maintain our

It is Mary as immaculate Spouse that is the distinguishing characteristic of Mariology as opposed to Christological uses of Mary.

In the early Church, the whole of Mariology was largely foreshadowed under the guise of ecclesiological treatments, in such terms as *virgo ecclesia* (virgin Church), *ecclesia immaculata* (immaculate Church), *ecclesia assumpta* (assumed Church). Pope Benedict XVI notes that the whole content of what would later become Mariology was first conceived as ecclesiology. The early Church intuitively understood—and through symbols, expressed—that the virgin motherhood of Mary, which is the fruit of her spiritual receptivity to God’s salvific work, is the prototype of the Church’s virgin motherhood with regard to Christians.⁴⁵ This idea is the confluence of two spousal themes in the early Church: Justin and Irenaeus had described the Virgin as the New Eve, mother of all the living and Spouse to Christ as the New Adam; and Tertullian and Methodius had shown the Church comes from the wound in the side of the crucified Christ, just as the first Eve came out of the side of the sleeping Adam. It is precisely through the symbolic and spiritual identification of Mary and the Church as spouse to Christ as the New Adam, that Ambrose brought these themes together for the first time, calling Mary the “*typus Ecclesiae*.” He in turn was followed by Augustine, Ephrem, and Cyril of Alexandria.

When we consider Mary as the Spouse of the Word in the fullest and most concrete way, we can now see why the Church, as the Bride of Christ, is Marian. Henri de Lubac habitually refers to the Church as “she.” The reason for this, beyond the tradition of calling Israel a woman in the Hebrew Bible, is most profoundly the Church’s relation to Mary. “In her the whole Church is outlined, and at the same time already completed; she is simultaneously the ‘seed’ and the ‘pleroma’ of it” (SC, 342). The fullness of the Church *is* Mary as the Bride of Christ and *in* Mary as the body of Christ. For, she is the Spouse *par excellence* and the Mother of the earthly Christ, in whom are already Head and Members. It is not a matter of “transferring,” as if by an afterthought, parallels from Mary to the Church, or the vice-versa. “[F]or here there is no place for anything that is merely of the surface; strictly speaking, there is no more question of going from one system of interpretation to another when we pass from the individual soul to Mary than there is when we pass from the Church to the soul---we are all the time moving along the same network of correspondences.” Mary is the first-beloved; but in her all saintly souls, and primarily the Church, whose ‘form’ she is, are also loved” (SC, 371). This means that Mary’s life is

⁴⁵ This early Christian conviction can be found in Vatican II: “*In mysterio enim Ecclesiae, quae et ipsa jure mater vocatur et virgo, beata Virgo Maria praecessit, eminenter et singulariter tum virginis tum matris exemplar praebens* (“In the mystery of the Church which also justly receives the title of mother and virgin the blessed Virgin Mary occupies the first place, offering, to an eminent and singular degree, the model of the virgin and the mother”, n. 63; developed in n. 64 and 65.).

already an embodiment of what the Church will be. The Church is not an organization, but an organism that has at its very heart a Marian experience.

(4) The Church as Immaculate Spouse – Sanctified

Church is more than “people”, more than structure and action: the Church contains the living mystery of maternity and of the bridal love that makes maternity possible. There can be ecclesial piety, love for the Church, only if this mystery

Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal (2011-01-12). *Mary: The Church at The Source* (p. 25). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

exists. When the Church is no longer seen in any but a masculine, structural, purely theoretical way, what is most authentically ecclesial about ecclesia has been ignored-the center upon which the whole of biblical and patristic talk about the Church actually hinges.¹¹

Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal (2011-01-12). *Mary: The Church at The Source* (pp. 25-26). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

Rather, the type remains true to its meaning only when the noninterchangeable personal figure of Mary becomes transparent to the personal form of the Church herself. In theology, it is not the person that is reducible to the thing, but the thing to the person. A purely structural ecclesiology is bound to degrade Church to the level of a program of action. Only the Marian dimension secures the place of affectivity in faith and thus ensures a fully human correspondence to the reality of the incarnate Logos.

Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal (2011-01-12). *Mary: The Church at The Source* (p. 27). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

(5) The Church as Virgin Mother – Sanctifying

IF THE ENTIRE ECONOMY OF EMBODIED MEDIATION FLOWS OUT OF THE LOGIC AND FACT OF THE INCARNATION, THEN IT IS PRECISELY IN THIS THAT THE

INTRINSIC AND ORGANIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARY AND THE CHURCH IS FOUND.

For them, the Church, just like Mary, was their Mother, the one through whom they were born into the one body of Christ. Take, for example, a Sermon by St Augustine:

You to whom I am speaking, you are the members of Christ. Who has given birth to you? I hear the voice of your heart: it is the Mother Church, this holy, honored Church who, like Mary, gives birth and is virgin. She gives birth to nations, but they are the members of one alone, of him whom she is the body and the spouse. In that, too, she bears the image of the Virgin Mary, because in this multitude, she is the mother of unity. As in Mary, we see in her perpetual integrity and incorruptible fruitfulness. What the first merited in her flesh, she has preserved in spirit. If the one gave birth to the only Son, the other gives birth to numerous sons who, by this only Son, are gathered into one.

Mary and the Church are in a certain sense organically connected by a single reality – the very body of the Word made flesh, the body *of which we, as baptized Christians, are members*. Insofar as we are members of Christ's body, the very body he received from Mary, we, too, are sons of Mary; and insofar as we were born into this body through the Church, the Church is our spiritual mother, bringing forth Christ into the world in and through us.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception is crucial for understanding this.

V. The Heart of the Church – The Heart of the World

Circumincision or perichoresis of the mysteries. We begin and end with the pierced heart of Christ.

Unity-in-difference or difference-in-unity. Unity as body of Christ but otherness as spouses. It's for this reason that the Eucharist is the heart.

The Eucharist unifies the Church and Mary as bringing forth

And for this reason, in the words of Paul Claudel, Mary can say, “I am the heart of the Church! It is I who, indissolubly wed to God by love, must lead Him deep down into the old wine cellar of the corporeal mansion, that He may revive the whole body to its extremities, and not suffer it to die” (Cantique, 27).

The logic of the spousal language is that it provides the measure of the unity-in-difference and the difference-in-unity between God and the human being in Christ. When we use the category of “body of Christ” to refer to the Church, we invoke one anagogic category to refer to the mystery of the relation between

Christ in the spiritual tension of love wherein the spousal mystery of Adam and Eve is consummated, hence, in the dynamism of a unity that does not abolish dialogical reciprocity [Gegenübersein]. By the same token, precisely the eucharistic-christological mystery of the Church indicated in the term “Body of Christ” remains within the proper measure only when it includes the mystery of Mary: the mystery of the listening handmaid who—liberated in grace—speaks her Fiat and, in so doing, becomes bride and thus body.¹³

Christology. In Pauline terms, however, the claim that we are the “Body of Christ” makes sense only against the backdrop of the formula of Genesis 2:24: “The two shall become one flesh” (cf. 1 Cor 6:17). The Church is the body, the flesh of

Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal (2011-01-12). *Mary: The Church at The Source* (p. 26). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

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It was, says de Lubac, ‘the boldness of Teilhard’s Mariology,’ so to understand the closeness of our Lady’s association with her Son that she herself is also universalized, precisely because of the uniqueness of her bond with him. He was particularly fond of the title ‘Our Lady’ for Mary, because it so readily pairs with ‘Our Lord’ for Christ, and conveys their inseparability. Ten years before the dogma of the Assumption was proclaimed, Teilhard had seen a parallel between our Lord’s Ascension and our Lady’s Assumption, and had gone so far as to apply to *her* as well as to Christ that text from Ephesians.”

“Of course we must remove the first clause, because Mary is fully one of us, a creature, so it cannot be said that ‘she descended.’ But we can affirm, he said, what follows: namely, that she ‘ascended, that she might fill all things.’ With Christ, he said, ‘she has filled all things.’ With Christ, ‘she forms “the fully-developed centre” of the “new earth,” around which centre the throng of the elect is now gathering.” (Article, 4).

The closer something gets to a principle, the more it participates in that principle’s effects. ... now, Christ is the principle of grace, authoritatively in his divinity and instrumentally in his humanity. ... But the Blessed Virgin was the closest to Christ with regard to humanity, because he took his human nature from her. And so, she had to receive from Christ a fullness of grace, greater than that of all others.

The Church is, therefore, a mystery; but a mystery must derive from something. The Church is a mystery because, coming from God and entirely at the service of his plan, she is an organism of salvation, precisely because she relates wholly to Christ and apart from him has no existence, value or efficacy.”
[same could be said of Mary – hence the immaculate conception]

Historical form.

There is a circularity to the doctrine of the immaculate conception: the Cross of Christ touches Mary in order to make her free and personal; Mary becomes the first member of

Mary as free and personal receives God spousally; Mary as spouse becomes Mary as Mother of God in conceiving and giving birth to Christ; in her capacity as Mother of Christ, she becomes Mother of the Church who is the body of Christ. Christ, thus born, is able to be sacrificed on the Cross. Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is diffused into the fabric of history through the work of the Spirit, both forwards and backwards; the Cross of Christ touches Mary in order to make her free and personal...

For Henri de Lubac, the flower of our salvation—that very flesh of God which is our hope and our redemption—took root in Mary's womb, grew to maturity on the Cross, and blossomed into the Church.

The thread connecting

The Church, tells us Mohler along with Augustine and Charles Journet, is the extension of the incarnation across time. Such a view organically connects all Christians to Mary and the Church through the one communion in Christ's body.

VI. The Heart of the Church:

treatments of Mary occurred in four modalities, typically identified with corresponding stages:
first

The historical origin of Mariology as a distinct area in dogmatic theology arrives with Bernard of Clairvaux.

The emergence of Mariology. It was not until this initially anonymous, though personally shaped, ecclesiology fused with the dogmatic propositions about Mary prepared in Christology that Mariology having an integrity of its own first emerged within theology (with Bernard of Clairvaux).