# The Final Mystery

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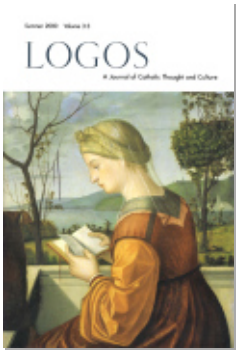


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# The Final Mystery

*Mariology* is the name given to theological reflection on Mary the Mother of God in the Catholic tradition. It is not to be confused with "mariolatry" or *worship* of Mary as a kind of goddess, which is not unknown—although it is found more in radical feminist or New Age circles, perhaps, than among traditionally-minded Catholics (even those whose spiritual life is centred around devotion to our Lady). However, it was a certain nervousness about the importance that Mary had begun to assume in Catholic theology that seems to have led the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to want to restore a balance in Catholic teaching by speaking of her mainly within *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Pope Paul VI gave her the formal title "Mother of the Church" to emphasize this intrinsic link between Mary and the Body of Christ.

What seems to be emerging today, forty years after the Council, is the fruit of those wise decisions: a revival of Marian studies after a period of decline, but a revival that seeks to integrate mariology more closely with developments in other branches of theology—with christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, eschatology, and the theology of the Trinity. In order for this development of Marian studies

Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin. The Mother of God. Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

to proceed, however, I believe that theologians must overcome their fear or disdain of the intense and popular movements of Marian devotion that have persisted and even grown after the Council. That devotion has been stirred up by an increasing number of (alleged) apparitions of our Lady in a multitude of locations and under a multitude of titles. The resulting popular literature has understandably been ignored by professional theologians. Or it has been taken as evidence for a lack of receptivity to the teachings of the Church embodied in the Council. In some cases this is not far from the truth. But these "charismatic" phenomena also may represent an authentic intuition of the Christian people (if not always literally a message from heaven), which needs to be taken into account—and which, I will argue, we are *now in a position to take into account*, thanks to other developments in theology during the century just finished.

I am referring to the movement of *ressourcement* among Catholic theologians, which revitalized the thinking and spirituality of the Latin Church by renewed contact with the early Church Fathers, and particularly the Fathers of the East. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the teaching of the postconciliar popes have been deeply marked by this movement. In particular, it is the "rediscovered" doctrine of *theosis* or divinization by grace, when combined with other fundamental principles of Catholic theology, that indicates how we can safely attribute to our Lady many of the titles and honors that popular devotion wishes to bestow upon her, without driving a wedge between her and the Church, or between her and ourselves. I will try to locate this idea in the heart of the Catholic tradition by relating it to the final glorious mystery of the Rosary, the Coronation of the Mother of God as Queen of heaven and earth.

## *Nature and Grace*

A theological question that was of great importance throughout the twentieth century was that of the relationship between nature and

grace. It lies at the root of a vast set of problems within the Catholic Church, including those associated with the modernist crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century, the disastrous results of the liturgical reform that took place after the Second Vatican Council in the middle years, and the steep decline in priestly and religious vocations toward the end of the century (at least in many parts of the developed world). The question of nature and grace is also associated with a cultural crisis much wider than any specifically Catholic concern.[1]

During the 1930s and 1940s, Henri de Lubac succeeded in showing that Catholic theology of the modern period had become distorted by a false consciousness, which he characterized as a "dualism" of nature and grace. The dualists believed that human nature had been created with its own natural goal or perfection, to which the supernatural goal of union with God had been added, or into which it was incorporated, by divine *fiat*. De Lubac, reading St. Thomas Aquinas in the spirit of the early Church Fathers, suggested that it would be more faithful to Catholic tradition to believe that man *has no natural end*, but naturally desires the Beatific Vision ("the spiritual creature does not have its end in itself, but in God"). The entire natural world, by implication and extension, was created for union with God in Christ through man and the Church. The cosmos is centred on the incarnation.

De Lubac opposed the modern tendency of theology to accept its confinement to a "sacred" realm divorced from the world of secular concerns. The acceptance of a dualism of ends had deprived Christianity, he thought, of its ability to get a grip on the problem of atheism. Modernity could see no reason *in human nature* to be concerned about God at all. If the link between natural and supernatural was essentially an arbitrary one (God's *whim* to give man a supernatural destiny), the faith that held them together was brittle glue indeed. The view of those who followed de Lubac was that man could never be understood except in terms of a hunger and thirst for the Infinite

(Augustine's "restless heart"). A purely secular anthropology must therefore be a fraud, because it left out of account *prayer*, which is the definitive human act, and self-giving *love*, which is the only possible fulfillment of the human self.

Some points of de Lubac's analysis remain controversial, and among those theologians who accepted his fundamental insight, several schools of thought developed on the "supernatural" fulfillment of nature. One important division was provoked by the need to find some way to secure the freedom of God and therefore the gratuity of grace. For if our nature is such that we have a *right to* supernatural fulfillment, it would seem that God is too tightly bound by his creature. According to Karl Rahner, God created us (in view of the union of divine and human natures that would be achieved definitively in Christ) with a "supernatural existential," a capacity or receptivity for that love which is God himself. This "burning longing" implanted in the heart of man is his ordination to eternal life, "unexacted" because a free gift of God to the rational animal. Thus everything natural is also more than natural, and that in every religion (and in no religion) man is experiencing and responding to divine grace without realizing it, or without naming it as such. Human love, for example, "always has a validity, an eternal significance and an inexpressible depth" because it is "a way of actualizing the love of God." All men of good will can consequently be called "anonymous Christians," whether or not they have been baptized. For Hans Urs von Balthasar, on the other hand, this interpretation risks depriving the Cross of its power and the Christian revelation of its purpose—and certainly of its drama. While opposing the dualism of nature and grace, Balthasar does not accept Rahner's argument that the *a priori* conditions for our acts of knowing and willing include a supernatural existential toward the Triune God, nor that this suffices to explain the interpenetration of grace and nature—despite the opportunities it would seem to offer of making the Christian revelation "relevant" to (because already implicit in) everyday, universal human

experience. Like Rahner and others Balthasar believes that God remains free at all times to give or withhold grace: our need for grace is a need precisely for a *free gift of love*. But his own way of understanding the gratuity of grace is less in terms of a metaphysics of knowledge than of a metaphysics of freedom. This is developed in his late work *Theo-Drama* (for example in the section "Infinite and Finite Freedom" in Volume II).[2]

In Balthasar's understanding, grace is a participation in God's nature, and thus precisely in God's freedom. Grace cannot after all be inbuilt at the creation (i.e., within the pre-conscious structure of human subjectivity). A personal "call" addressed from without is necessary to open us to grace, a call ultimately from the Cross—a call to which grace itself gives us the ever-greater capacity to respond. The "first gift" of existence and receptivity, including the desire for a gift that would exceed our nature, must be clearly distinguished from the "second gift" that is sanctifying grace. Balthasar writes that God

> offers to provide a home in the realm of the infinite (that is, of God) for finite freedom's essential self-transcendence; he offers it the right of citizenship there. This is something to which finite freedom cannot itself lay claim, on the basis of its own transcendental structure [Rahner's supernatural existential] . . . ; any such "claim" would conflict inwardly with the act of thanksgiving for the gift of self.[3]

Implied here is the belief that to become fulfilled the creature must remain *open to the Giver*, and that it can be so only in gratitude. The ability to give thanks for the miracle of existence is awoken by a revelation of the presence of Another (normally, in the child's experience, the mother): one by whom I am addressed and by whom my existence is affirmed as good. For Balthasar as for de Lubac and Rahner, an implicit "baptism of desire" is perfectly possible and therefore so are "anonymous Christians."[4] However, Balthasar thinks that

the way or the extent to which this implicit faith suffices for salvation is "not disclosed to us"; it is, in a sense, none of our concern. It seems we must assume that if a non-Christian is to be saved it will always be through a decision, a conscious choice, a response to the historical figure of Christ, made either in life or in the moment of death. Rahner's account, according to Balthasar, would damage the Church's sense of her own uniqueness, identity, and mission. For Balthasar, salvation is anchored in (and not merely, as in Rahner, revealed in) the passion of Christ. Without the Cross of Jesus, and without the penetration of time by eternity in the incarnation, the depths of divine love would always have remained inaccessible to the very creatures who were made by and for that love.

De Lubac's analysis as developed by Balthasar seems to lie behind John Paul II's emphasis on a "new evangelization" in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The Pope's theology of the missions (and he sees Western Europe and America too as mission territory) is largely based on a strong sense of the newness and uniqueness of Christ. Three quotations from *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) will suffice to illustrate this. "The urgency of missionary activity derives from the *radical newness of life* brought by Christ and lived by his followers. This new life is a gift from God, and people are asked to accept and develop it, if they wish to realize the fulness of their vocation in conformity to Christ" (7). "Salvation, which always remains a gift of the Spirit, requires man's cooperation, both to save himself and to save others" (9). "The proclamation of the word of God has *Christian conversion* as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith. Conversion is a gift of God, a work of the Blessed Trinity" (46). Rahner's theology of grace would have been quite inadequate to sustain such an intense emphasis on evangelization.[5]

## *A Dramatic Mariology*

But what is the relevance of all this to mariology? It is no accident that the Pope of the new evangelization, the Pope who at every opportunity condemns the "culture of death" and calls Western civilization to a reawakening of the inner life, is also the most profoundly Marian pope of recent times. *Mariology*, far from being some kind of theological sideshow (as a few would like to make it), is an absolutely key area, and never more so than today. It is Mary who is held up by scripture and tradition as the model woman, indeed the model "creation," the model of a graced and graceful creature. By developing their thoughts on Mary "full of grace," theologians are in fact working out most concretely what they believe about the relation of nature to grace and about the supernatural end of man. Mary turns out to be the cultural and theological fulcrum around which the question of nature and grace actually turns.

Karl Rahner's account of grace—the fundamental drift of his theology—leads him to place much less emphasis on Mary and consequently on mariology than Balthasar. While accepting the Marian dogmas as a faithful Catholic, he sees Mary chiefly as a type of the perfect believer, the Christian disciple. Her special privileges (for example the Assumption) are merely anticipations of what will eventually be true of all. She is also, somewhat like Christ himself, the culmination of an evolutionary process that brings forth what has been implicit from the beginning, rather than a completely new and unlooked-for beginning. Balthasar's whole theology of grace, by contrast, revolves around the notion of "calling" and *missio*. For him, everything is a dialogue between two freedoms, between self and other, between God and man, between man and woman. As a result, Mary's significance becomes altogether different. (The place to look for this is in Volume III of *Theo-Drama*, "Woman's Answer." Balthasar has already explored the interplay of divine and human freedom in Volume II. His theology of freedom and of grace now enables him to develop a particularly "dramatic" theology of Mary.)

Mary is for Balthasar the Mediatrix not only of grace to nature, but of a "head-on collision of the realities of the Old and New Covenants," as well as of motherhood and virginity. Drawing on the insights of the Church Fathers as well as directly on Scripture, he presents Mary as the "New Eve" and as the epitome and Immaculate Heart of the Church, on whose free self-gift to God in the Holy Spirit the history of salvation turns. The *missio* of Mary is in a sense the supreme Christian mission, because it constitutes Christianity itself, and lays a foundation for the Church even deeper than the "rock" of the Petrine office. According to a study by Brendan Leahy,

> The novelty of von Balthasar's intuition is that he goes beyond a static understanding of Mary as "type" and "mother" of the Church in pointing to a vibrant Marian "principle" within the life of the Church. He underlines an effective presence of Mary in the incarnational dynamism of the Church's life as an ever-new event in history. To reflect upon the Marian principle in the Church is to reflect upon an essential structure or dimension. It is a treatment of a fundamental aspect of the Church's ontology, of her constitutive nature.[6]

The relationship of Mary's mission to that of the Apostles, and the priority of the Marian principle (of Mary's "Yes") over the Petrine principle of "office," is described in detail in Balthasar's *The Office of Peter*. "The Marian fiat, in its truly unlimited availability, is, by grace, the bridal womb, matrix and mater, through which the Son of God becomes man, and thus it is by this fiat that he also forms the truly universal Church." Pope John Paul II even adopts this terminology in his own authoritative teaching, notably in *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), through which it finds its way into paragraph 773 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Confident in the tradition of Mary's virginity, Balthasar is able to unite in the figure of Mary the otherwise incompatible titles of Mother and Bride of the Son:

> as a Mother, she has to mediate—in the requisite purity—everything human that her Child needs; as her Son's "companion" and "bride," she must be able to share his sufferings in a way appropriate to her, and what most fits her for this task is her utter purity, which means she is profoundly exposed and vulnerable.[7]

Balthasar explains that the privilege of exemption from original sin, far from taking Mary away from us, deepens her solidarity with mankind (although it took centuries for theologians to realize the fact and thus be prepared to admit the Immaculate Conception). It is *sin* not virtue that separates men from each other: "innocence makes it possible to be open to suffering with others and to be ready, in love, to embrace such suffering."[8]

Citing patristic sources, Balthasar speaks of Mary as "delivered from death and transfigured in the presence of God; she is made like her Son and is given a share in his work of rescuing mankind from death."[9] It is important to point out that he does not, however, recommend the use of the title *Coredemptrix*, which might seem the natural conclusion of his argument. Instead he sides with what he calls the "moderate" and "shrewd" voices of tradition, like Albert the Great and Adam Widenfels who rejected it.[10] The term Coredemptrix itself is felt to be dangerous because it might encourage the tendency "to attribute superhuman privileges to Mary's earthly existence." He is wary, similarly, of any talk of Mary as "Empress" and ourselves as her "lackeys" or "slaves," as in St. Bernard and in Grignion de Montfort, who lived in a "period of absolutism" and so could think that perfect devotion to Mary consisted in feudal consecration. "Is it still possible in all this to find the simple belief that Mary, as a member of the Church, is our Sister?" Balthasar asks; adding (in the same footnote): "The fact that several of these authors have been canonized does not clothe their inaccuracies with legitimacy."

Nevertheless, despite Balthasar's reservations about the formal application of the term, the essential substance of the doctrine of

coredemption is clearly present in his writing. Indeed it could be said to follow from his insistence that the correct Marian, feminine, and creaturely attitude before the Creator is no mere passivity but a form of *active receptivity*—an act of freedom—and his emphasis on the *fiat* or consent of the Mother of God to both incarnation and atonement.[11] It is not surprising, therefore, when a theologian influenced by Balthasar develops a theology of "co-expiation." According to Norbert Hoffman, the mission of Christ on earth is an extension of his begetting by the Father in the immanent Trinity; that is, of his "Sonship." Through the mediation of the Holy Spirit who makes us sons by grace, we too become expiators of the world's sins, even though we are sinners ourselves.[12] But this would apply in a unique manner to the sinless co-expiation of the Virgin Mary.

Every grace implies a mission, says Balthasar: what can be said of hers, who is full of grace? Mary has an "unlimited mission" as cooperator with and Mediatrix of all the graces that are given to mankind through the *kenosis* of the Son. Balthasar's close associate Adrienne von Speyr encapsulates this as follows: "He had redeemed her also, by preserving her from sin. That gives her the capacity to suffer with him, vicariously for all, as an embodiment of the meaning of the redemption, in the perfect unity of human nature and divine grace." To a lesser extent this applies to all of the redeemed: in being granted a personal mission, our lives are to become "coredemptive" in Christ.

> Because the Son suffers for everyone and because Mary's co-suffering—the physical as well as the spiritual—is a part of her Son's suffering, *her* suffering is accomplished for everyone and is usable by everyone. In her maternal way she takes part in the universality of her Son's crucifixion. And, because she is so firmly bound up with him in the co-suffering that he does not want to work the universal redemption without her, she now renounces her private intimacy with him. Into the space between her and the Son she admits everyone for whom he

> will suffer, everyone for whom she already now receives the sword of the Son. And because everyone is admitted here, everyone comes through the Mother to the Lord.[13]

Finally, in Adrienne von Speyr's *Three Women and the Lord* (95–96) we find the following luminous passage:

> The Mother suffers in herself because she is Mother, and her maternal suffering comprises both her own suffering and the suffering of her Child. Such suffering with her child is part of the mystery of all motherhood; it is not the child's suffering directly, but it arises in the mother as a result of the incomparable and unique way in which her being participates in the being of the child. In Mary this motherhood mystery acquires a totally new form because she is a virgin and has conceived by the Holy Spirit, and because the son born by her as man is also God. Her suffering resides in the Son, and his in her, in a way unequalled in any natural mother-son relationship; this is the archetype—the unattainable archetype—of all natural relationships. The Son needs the Mother's suffering: not to lessen his own, but so that his suffering can begin to be affirmed and taken up by the other believers, so that it can be completed and spread abroad in the Church, according to his predetermined plan. The Mother's Yes, her consent, uttered and lived out, was essential: it was to be an archetype, an example making discipleship possible for the whole Church. The Son needs this suffering in order to show the Father that he is not suffering alone. From the very outset the work of redemption has an open door toward mankind; the Son can go through this door to those who are his and can invite them to come in. He not only redeems believers, he incorporates them into his work as collaborators. Through the door that is represented by the Mother, the grace of the Cross gives to men a new form

> of merit. To those who are gathered around the Cross the Son gives the perfect grace of redemption which he won in his dereliction there; this work of redemption comes to them, as to everyone, without the slightest merit on their part, yet he allows them a unique participation in it in which merit does actually accrue to them.

"The Creator shines brightest in the *creative creature*."[14] God is glorified the more his creature resembles him in the use it makes of its own freedom. "God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of cooperating in the accomplishment of his plan."[15] Just as Catholic social teaching applies this principle in the form of "subsidiarity," so the doctrine of coredemption (if correctly understood)[16] applies it to the passion, and in an appropriately qualified manner to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

## *Trinity,* Theosis, *and Coronation*

But a modern "mariological synthesis" requires one more element; namely, the development of an adequate understanding of the part played in all of this by the Holy Spirit. After all, the Blessed Virgin Mary is traditionally called the "Spouse of the Holy Spirit" because she is totally united with him: he is the Spirit of her Son as well as the Spirit of the Father. All the graces she had received in her life up to and including the moment of the annunciation had freed her to say "yes" to the will of the Trinity— *her own "yes,"* not a yes wrung from her out of fear or lack of any will of her own. Her whole life was a journey ever deeper into God, for though she was "full of grace" from the start, grace always opens up new capacities for grace. This intimate intertwining of Mary's life and personality with the Holy Spirit is perhaps the reason why there has traditionally been less emphasis in Western theology on the Holy Spirit, on pneumatology,

than in the East. *In the West our theology of the Spirit has tended to take the form of mariology*. What we now need is a theology that would reintegrate mariology with the theology of the Trinity, since this has undergone significant development in recent years.

Balthasar, for example, follows the Orthodox (Cappadocian) tradition, and among modern writers Sergei Bulgakov in particular, in granting "person" a kind of metaphysical primacy over "substance." He has developed a theology of the Trinity in which *kenosis* and the personalistic, dialogical exchange of love—of self-giving and "letting be"—have a central place. What results from this, according to Gerard O'Hanlon, is a "scripturally-inspired ontology of love," in which "one uses the analogy of human love and applies is hypothetically to God, making adjustments to cater for the ontological difference between God and us, so that it is possible at least to hint at the way in which various modalities of human love could exist analogously in God as perfections, and not as deficiencies": modalities such as expectation, hope and fulfillment, gratitude and adoration.[17]

The saint of Auschwitz, Maximilian Kolbe, has also given a much-needed impetus to the integration of Marian and Trinitarian reflection (especially pneumatology) by writing that the Blessed Virgin was so intimately united with the Spirit, so transparent to him, so much of one will with him, that she became his "quasi-incarnation." The Holy Spirit, he writes, is the "uncreated Immaculate Conception," of whom the Blessed Virgin is the created representation and image. This formulation remains highly controversial, not least because it does not seem adequate to preserve the distinction between the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. The phrase "Uncreated Immaculate Conception" would seem to apply more directly to the Person of the Son as the one "begotten" by the Father than to the Spirit "breathed forth." I would be inclined to defend Kolbe's phrase by arguing that "Conception" here refers rather to the *act* of conception than to the one conceived or begotten in or through the act.[18] The Holy Spirit is thus the one

"in whom" the Son is eternally begotten, the one "in whom" the Father contemplates and loves his Son.[19] The motherhood of the Mother of God then becomes an image of the *active conceiving* of this Word in the bosom of the eternal Trinity—the Word carried on the breath of the Spirit, the wings of the Dove. She is the earthly image of the "hearing" or "understanding" of the Eternal Word. For the Word generated by the Father is understood by the one in whom it is received perfectly—by that person, in fact, who is the Immaculate Conception. The Mother of God is thus the earthly image not of the Father's generation of the Son, nor of the Son's generation by the Father, but of the Holy Spirit's *conception* of the Son as a gift for the Father and for the world.[20] This means also that the Mother of God is an image of the way the Son is *loved* in the eternal Trinity, since in God to understand is to love and to love is to understand.

Here is part of a text from Kolbe written in 1940 as the sketch of a book he hoped one day to write:

> Every act of love in God comes forth from the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit. God creates, maintains in existence, gives life and growth in the natural as well as in the supernatural order. In his love God supports in existence all his innumerable limited created resemblances; and the love-reaction that is provoked in the creature can return to the Father only through the Holy Spirit and the Son. . . . We may not always realize this fully, yet such is the case. No one but God is the author of the act of love found in a creature; but when this creature is intelligent and free such an act cannot be elicited without its consent.
>
> Among creatures, the summit of this love that goes back to God is the Immaculata, the one being totally without any stain of sin, all beautiful, all divine. At no time did her will ever deviate from God's will. With all its strength, her will was always at one with his. In her there came about the marvelous union of God with creation. The Father gave her his Son, as to his spouse, the Son came down into her virginal

womb to become her child; in her the Holy Spirit miraculously fashioned the body of Jesus and made her soul his own dwelling place, penetrating her whole being in such an ineffable manner that the expression "Spouse of the Holy Spirit" is far from adequate to express the life of the Spirit in her and through her. In Jesus there are two natures, divine and human, but one single Person who is God; here on the contrary we have two natures and two persons, the Holy Spirit and the Immaculata, but united in a union that defies all human expression.

The Holy Spirit does not confer any grace, the Father does not give supernatural life to any soul by the Son and the Holy Spirit, unless these gifts are bestowed through the Mediatrix of all grace, the Immaculata, who cooperates in the giving, and distributes them as she wills. She obtains from God all the treasures of grace, as belonging to her, and she distributes them to whomsoever she wills, as she wills.

The fruit of the love of God and of the Immaculata is Jesus, the Son of God and of man, the Mediator between God and man. Just as the Son from all eternity is, so to speak, the mediator between the Father and the Holy Spirit, so too Jesus, the incarnate Son, becomes the direct Mediator between the Father and the Holy Spirit (who is, so to speak, as though he were incarnate), and the Immaculata, the Representative and spiritual Mother of all humanity. And it is by her and not otherwise that the love of creatures can rise to Jesus, and by him go back to the Father. . . .

The soul gives all its acts of love to the Immaculata, not as though she were a simple intermediary, but as though she acquired them as her own, completely; for the soul understands that the Immaculata will then offer these acts to Jesus as though they were hers, and hence spotless, immaculate; and so he can offer them to the Father.

In this way the soul will belong more and more perfectly to the Immaculata, just as the Immaculata herself belongs to Jesus, and Jesus to his Father.

> And even as the flux and reflux of love constitute the very life of God in the bosom of the Trinity, so too will it be between the Creator and the creature which turns back to the Creator from whom it sprang forth.[21]

The particular importance of Kolbe's approach is the way it suggests a possible integration of mariology with trinitarian theology by identifying Mary's mission so closely with that of the Spirit in the world. But this mission is concerned with the very purpose of the incarnation. *God became man so that man could become God.* This formulation of St. Athanasius, much used by the early Church Fathers, seems to us in the modern West perhaps dangerously bold, though it is perfectly scriptural.[22] "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall *be like him*, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). The goal of our earthly existence is to become in the end, as the Blessed Virgin Mary was from the beginning, "like him," by becoming "full of grace." And this *theosis*, this deification, comes about through the Holy Spirit. As the *Catechism* says (quoting St. Athanasius), God "gave himself to us through his Spirit. By the participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature. . . . For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized" (n. 1988). Not only is Mary, as the one in whom the Spirit dwells *par excellence*, the prime example of a creature divinized by the grace of the Spirit, but she makes possible the divinization of others.

Participation in the divine nature is necessarily also participation in the very act of redeeming the world. To be "like God" is not only to "see him as he is" (1 John 3:2), but to descend like him, to give oneself like him, to love like him—to be caught up in the self-giving that we have recognized as the very life of the Trinity. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Titles and privileges such as "Advocate," "Mediator," and even "Coredeemer," while they belong primarily to the third person of the Holy Trinity, with due care can all be rightly and properly

shared with the Mother of God. In the words of St. Maximilian, "When we honour the Immaculata we are, very specifically, adoring the Holy Spirit"; and elsewhere, "It is the Holy Spirit that we love in her; and through her we love the Son."[23] She is divinized precisely by the fullness of the graces flowing from her indwelling spouse. These are graces intended not only for herself alone, but for the entire world. In her "the Church and the entire universe have their crown, their personal achievement which throws open the way of deification to the whole creation."[24]

There is no risk, in the perspective I have identified with that of "mariological synthesis," of Mary being regarded as some kind of fourth divine Person alongside her Son. The privilege of divinization is offered to all of us: Mary is simply the one in whom that process is already completed, having been prepared for this by her exemption from any of the limitations imposed by sin. It is represented for us most clearly in the final glorious mystery of the Rosary: the Coronation of Our Lady as Queen of heaven and earth. Through the Coronation of the Virgin Mother of God our own "royal priesthood," our own *theosis*, is made possible.

## *Conclusion: More Mother than Queen*

The mystery of *theosis*, it seems to me, is something we need to be reminded of today more than ever, at the end of a secular age in which so many have tried to live as though God did not exist. The vision of Mary, crowned with flowers on earth and with stars in heaven, is the one image of human destiny that can stand up against the hedonistic vision, the corrupted imagination, and impure heart of the decadent twentieth century. It can, of course, too easily be presented as a pretty picture with no connection to everyday life, and to the everyday struggle for sanctity. Mary, after all, did not have to "struggle" for holiness. Mary is unique: how can her special privileges be of concern to us, except indirectly? We see in this common atti-

tude another effect of the longstanding dualism between nature and grace, discussed earlier. By being "preredeemed," by being conceived Immaculate, by being assumed bodily into heaven, many feel that Mary has been removed from the natural sphere and placed in the supernatural. But what has in fact been lost here is the sense that Mary is the heart of the Church *of which we are the members.* If the only fulfillment of nature is through grace, then she who is full of grace shows us the fulfillment of our own natures also. To her state we may also attain—even if only in the partial way appropriate to our less central position in the Mystical Body, and through a process of purification that for her is unnecessary. She does not have to *struggle* for sanctity, but she suffers with us in our struggle, and accompanies us, not in the useless way of a person who makes all the same mistakes, but in the helpful way that can support us with unfailing patience, compassion, and wisdom.

The commonly voiced objection to any renewed emphasis on the Coronation is that already noted (in connection with Balthasar), that by giving attention to the Queenship of Mary we may lose sight of her maidenly humility as sister and friend. St. Thérèse of Lisieux in a reflection on the Coronation similarly remarks that the Blessed Virgin is "*more Mother than Queen*": a mother does not want to eclipse the glory of her children but make them shine more brightly. The danger of that would be lessened in the context of a theological synthesis that made clear the nature and purpose of Marian devotion. But it could be argued (on historical as well as theological grounds) that whenever the Mother of God is "downgraded" the saints are sure to follow, until even the concept of sanctity is lost.

In any case, Pope John Paul II, in his encyclicals and numerous weekly audiences on Mary, has shown that Mary's "state of royal freedom" flows precisely from her humility as handmaid, mother, and sister. In the Kingdom of God, *to serve means to reign*. The phrase is one he picks up from Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, 36), and quotes in Section 41 of *Redemptoris Mater* (1987). It is true of Christ, who

"came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," becoming first a child, then a prisoner, then a dead man; entering the glory of his kingdom in this very way. It is true of any disciple of Jesus, and it is true above all for his Mother. The Pope goes on to say that the

> glory of serving does not cease to be her royal exaltation: assumed into heaven, she does not cease her saving service, which expresses her maternal mediation "until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect." Thus, she who here on earth "loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the Cross," continues to remain united with him, while now "all things are subjected to him, until he subjects to the Father himself and all things." In her Assumption into heaven, Mary is as it were clothed by the whole reality of the Communion of Saints, and her very union with the Son in glory is wholly oriented towards the definitive fullness of the Kingdom, when "God will be all in all."

If Mary is, as the *Catechism* tells us in one of its headings, an *eschatological icon of the Church*, it is in the figure of the Virgin Mary, united with Christ in heaven, that our destiny and calling as human beings are most fully revealed to us. Mary is already the Church that we are summoned to become through repentance and purification. She is *nature perfected* in a single person, and transfigured by the grace to which she offers not the faintest shadow of resistance. It is the image of her "Coronation" or eschatological transfiguration that most fully expresses the final effects of grace on nature: the integration of human life with the life of the eternal and ever-blessed Trinity.

## *Notes*

1. See e.g. Jean Borella, *The Sense of the Supernatural* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).
2. See Thomas G. Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1997).
3. H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, Vol. II (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 313–14.
4. But not an "anonymous Christianity." See H. U. von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 152.
5. As Balthasar famously argued in *Cordula:* see again *The Moment of Christian Witness.*
6. B. Leahy, *The Marian Principle in the Church According to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), 21.
7. H. U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, Vol. III (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 323.
8. Ibid., 324.
9. Ibid., 336.
10. Ibid., 315–16
11. While preserving the (theo-logical) priority of the Trinitarian Father in the act of generation, Balthasar attributes a kind of equality to the "active-receptive" generating love and to the "receptive-active" love that conceives and gives birth, thus confirming—in God as in the creaturely reflection of God—"the ultimate dignity and relevance of the feminine principle in the constitution of our eternal blessedness": *Theo-Drama*, Vol. V (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 471.
12. See Alberto Espezel, "Inclusive Representation and Atonement in Norbert Hoffman," *Communio*, Summer 1997.
13. Quotations are from A. von Speyr, *Handmaid of the Lord* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 116–17, 78–79.
14. Christoph Schonborn, *Loving the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 55.
15. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 306.
16. The question of whether this doctrine should be formally defined as a dogma of the Church has been extensively debated in recent years. It may well be that to do so in the terms proposed would foster popular misunderstanding of our Lady's role in relation to that of her divine Son. This article does not seek to enter into the argument on one side or another. It is clearly for the Church to decide what is appropriate in this regard.
17. G. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 169; cf. 79–81.
18. At one point Kolbe coins the term "Immaculation" to describe her: i.e., she is *action* rather than *thing*. See H. M. Manteau-Bonamy O.P., *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit: The Marian Teachings of St. Maximilian Kolbe* (Franciscan Marytown Press, 1977), 72n.
19. For an examination of the idea that the Father begets the Son "in the Spirit" see Thomas Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

20. It is the Holy Spirit in whom the divine nature is "expropriated" so as to become gift. John Paul II describes the Holy Spirit in section 10 of his 1986 encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* as "Person-Gift": "through the Holy Spirit God exists in the mode of gift." (The Holy Spirit is therefore in a particular way the "model" of grace itself.) In receiving the divine nature from the Father, the Son is *generated* as the one whose being is "from" the Father. But the Father does not simply give his nature to the Son without the Spirit proceeding. The Spirit is the gift that unites Father and Son even as it distinguishes them. Without this gift, which is the Father's nature poured out upon the Son (the "*super-kenosis*" of the Father, as Balthasar calls it), there would be no Son. The point here, though, is that the Father is not himself the gift—though it is true he gives himself! That is to say, he cannot be the gift *as Father*, because he remains the Father (and in fact is Father precisely *because* he gives himself). It is the divine nature that is his gift. The eternal generation of the Son by the Father therefore gives rise to the Person of the Spirit, who is the mediator between them—and therefore also the one in whom (into whose "lap," as it were) the Son pours himself out as an oblation; in whom the Son's nature "again" becomes gift (this time for the Father). This is what I mean by calling the Holy Spirit the *conceiving* of the Son as distinct from his begetting.
21. Cited by H. M. Manteau-Bonamy O.P., op. cit., 128–29.
22. John 10:34–35 (Ps. 82:6); 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Peter 1:4; also 1 John 3:2.
23. H. M. Manteau-Bonamy O.P., op. cit., 71 and 50 respectively.
24. V. Lossky, ibid., 194.