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MARY: ICON OF TRINITARIAN LOVE¹

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ABSTRACT:

This article argues that the presence of Mary to Christian faith can be helpfully considered as a “saturated phenomenon” (Jean-Luc Marion). Inseparable from the Christ-Event, the Marian phenomenon affects faith’s perception of the self-revelation of God. It is theologically illumined by reflecting on the seven key terms that are essential to the Christian story: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Cross, Resurrection, Church and Eternal Life.

The Marian presence in Christian life is a manifold phenomenon—in scripture, liturgy, doctrine, devotion, art, spirituality,² personal witness and theological traditions, not to mention of apparitions and special places of pilgrimage. In Catholic parlance, this compact, multifaceted and intensely personal presence is often referred to as the “mystery of Mary” in the life of the Church. It cannot be separated from what Paul speaks of as “the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his [God’s] saints...Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:26-27). Doctrinal language refers to the “mysteries of faith”—the Trinity, incarnation,

grace and the beatific vision. These are the revealed objects of faith, since reason unaided could not deduce them. On a more devotional level, there are the “mysteries” of the life of our Lord. Various aspects of Christian revelation become the subject of contemplation—as in the once fifteen, and now twenty, “mysteries of the Rosary”.³ On a more theological plane, say in the theology of Karl Rahner, “mystery” is fundamental notion expressive of God’s self-communication to the human spirit.⁴ The mystery in this sense is not something to be solved, but something so given, and so radically self-giving, that it constitutes the basic horizon of life and existence itself. Consequently, all the “mysteries” of faith are aspects of the one self-giving mystery of God which, even as it communicates itself in the Word and Spirit, remains ever beyond any finite grasp. Even in the beatific vision of God face-to-face, the inexhaustible infinities of the divine reality is not comprehended. In that final vision, the divine mystery is not lessened in the life of the blessed, but more positively appreciated in its boundless excess.

In this perspective, the mystery of Mary in the life of the People of God can be helpfully appreciated as “saturated phenomenon” (Jean-Luc Marion). It so permeates Christian consciousness as to demand a special kind of receptivity appropriate to the gift of revelation itself. Christian theology, through it is “faith seeking understanding”, can get lost in refined conceptualism and systematic control unless it is phenomenologically grounded in a “faith receptive to the distinctiveness of what has been so given”. There is an “excess” of the divine self-giving that overflows and disrupts the mundane routines of human experience and rational control.

In line with such a phenomenological perspective, this article is presented in four main sections:

1. A phenomenologically attuned theology of Mary;⁵

2. Doctrinal Development: The Marian Catalyst;
3. Key Terms in the Marian phenomenon;
4. Seven evocative correlations.

1. A Phenomenologically Attuned Theology of Mary

Fundamental to a phenomenological approach is receptivity to what is given on its own terms. It must be allowed to impose itself on the consciousness of faith in its own singularity. Whether it is the Christian phenomenon as a whole, or the place of Mary within it, what has been *so* given, must be allowed to disclose itself in its own way. That is to say that the phenomenon, least of all in the realm of faith, does not show itself as already circumscribed by the abstract, systematic generalizations of the rational ego that are already in place. Neither human nor divine possibilities are so pre-established. In the teeming, elusive relativities of the postmodern world, there is an opportunity for Christian faith to show not only the courage of its own convictions, but also to act with a fresh receptivity to the distinctiveness of revelation, and so witness to the prodigal excess of the gift from which it is born.⁶

What has been *so* given constitutes the *data* for Christian intelligence. More deeply, it is received as the *donum*, the gift, flowing forth from the inexhaustible and ever-continuing self-giving of God in Christ. This prodigality of self-giving saturates every dimension of Christian life. In the light of the resurrection, Christ gives himself as incarnate among us, present in the gift of the Spirit, and in the word of the inspired Scriptures, in the sacraments of the ecclesial community; and, indeed, through the entire universe transformed in him. This manifold self-giving of Christ contains a particular dimension. He gives his Mother to the Church represented by the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:26-27).

For the moment, we observe simply that the phenomenality of Mary in the life of the Church is saturated with the singularity of the Christ-event in which she stands. In that horizon of grace, Mary is not an idolic or mythological projection of religious sensibilities. She appears, rather, as an iconic “re-presentation” of the Christocentric focus of Christian existence. Her presence is back-lit, as it were, by the “light from light”, to use the phrase from the Nicene Creed. Her singular place in the event of God’s self-giving love affects faith’s perception of the truth that is revealed, of the identity it confers, of the community it forms, and of world-renewing praxis it inspires. When the Christian community contemplates the Marian phenomenon in all its dimensions, faith is not distracted from the realm of light inaccessible (1 Tim 6:16). Nor does it turn from the light that shines through the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). Rather, the figure of Mary gestures toward the source of light itself. She represents the intentionality of faith in its receptivity to the Christ-event. In the words of Elizabeth’s greeting, “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (Lk 1:45). Mary has surrendered to the incalculable significance of what is being revealed, and yielded to its unfolding in time. In her maternal receptivity to God’s self-involvement in the world, “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19), for “his mother treasured all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51). She embodies the heart of faith surrendering to the God for whom “nothing will be impossible” (Lk 1:37).

For Mary, the mystery not only in her heart and mind; for she is also *in* it in the wholeness of her being. She is caught up in excess of what is taking place, within the event itself, and participating in its unfolding in history. Given to faith in the saturated phenomenon of Christ, she is “in Christ” in her uniqueness. She pre-figures the transformatively new: “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Cor 5:17). As the Virgin Mother of

Jesus, as Mother of the Church, already possessed by the Holy Spirit, she intimately belongs to this “new creation”. Though what we shall be is not yet revealed (1 Jn 3:2), the destined transformation of all is anticipated in Mary. As Mother of Christ, head and members, she witnesses to the incalculable rebirth of all in the Spirit. She represents in her person that such a world-changing event is not a time-conditioned *fait accompli*, but an ongoing drama for human freedom. In this regard, she represents the adventure of the Christian vocation, in the deepest meaning of the word, *ad venturum*, literally, “toward the one who will come”. She stands at the point where human existence has been made open to the imaginable future of “God all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). She stands, therefore, within the event of God’s self-revelation as its servant and witness.⁷ In this measure, the event of God’s entry into human history shows its “anarchic”, irreducibly original character in the Virgin Mother. She proclaims the grace she has received, witnessing to the God who “scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts”, who brings down the powerful from their thrones, exalting the lowly, and filling the hungry with good things (cf. Lk 1:48-53).

As the history of Christian art testifies, Mary has inspired the deepest feelings for the beautiful, to give faith’s dim apprehension of the glory to be revealed a focus and embodiment. In the divine beauty that plays on her, the mundane house of human experience must be arranged to let in new possibilities. The aesthetic character of God’s self-disclosure has provoked refined responses in theological phenomenology.⁸ God enters the human world by appealing to the intimations of beauty and longing that stir the human heart. Speaking of art more generally, a noted critic, George Steiner, makes a telling point. To appreciate any work of art, be it a poem, a painting, a sculpture or a great piece of music, we must enter wholly into it and breathe the sense of life it evokes. We do not behold it from the outside, but give ourselves over to entering into the world it depicts. Art transforms consciousness. It reorients our existence by inspiring

sensitivities to what has previously been hidden or overlooked. Beauty enacted in art evokes a deeper awareness of the mystery of being and the depths of experience. It has a transformative impact, even as it witnesses to the transcendent. Steiner, a European intellectual of Jewish background, finds in the image of the Annunciation an evocation of aesthetic dimensions usually bracketed out of our routine experience:

the shorthand image is that of the Annunciation, of “a terrible beauty” or gravity breaking into the small house of our cautionary being. If we have heard rightly the wing-beat and the provocation of that visit, the house is no longer habitable in quite the same way as before. A mastering intrusion has shifted the light...⁹

To use Steiner’s image, Mary stands at the point where the light shifts, and a larger horizon opens up. When the Angel Gabriel is sent to Mary to announce that she is to be the mother of Jesus, the Messiah, the measure of “the small house” of our humanly-bounded existence is made open to another presence—the One she is to conceive. Around her gathers the “terrible beauty” and “gravity” of God’s self-revelation with its “transformative summons”.

As the Mother of Christ, she is now related to the Church as a unique member of his transformed body of Christ. For from her flesh, Christ was born; and in her flesh, she is united with him in his glory.¹⁰ Her “body” or “flesh” is saturated with a special sense of immediacy and unobjectifiable intimacy with her Son, a field communication with God, in mutual indwelling and self-disclosure. Her whole bodily being has been re-experienced in the flesh of Christ,¹¹ to incarnate the form of self-giving love for those who are “members, one of another” (Eph 4:25), “for no one ever hates his own flesh, but he nourishes and tenderly care for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body” (Eph 5:30). The Letter to the Ephesians does not hesitate to appeal to the most intimate, ecstatic and generative human experience of the body in spousal love to express Christ’s relationship to the ecclesial body. Just as man and

woman become “one flesh” (Gn 2:23; Mt 19:6; Mk 10:8), the risen One is one flesh with the community of believers. As the human mother of Jesus, she is “one flesh” with her son. In the realm of the new creation, she is now “one flesh” with him in a nuptial sense (cf. Gen 2:23; Mt 19:6; Mk 10:8)—for Christ has “made her holy” (Eph 5:26) and presented her “to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle” (v. 27).

When the face of Mary is turned toward the Church, her features reveal something of the invisible totality of Christ, the son she holds within her. Her gaze makes its own demands: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Her face is not a mirror reflecting back our own image, but more a window through which the light of an arresting otherness breaks through. Paul speaks expansively of Christ, “the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). It calls forth prayer, adoration and self-surrender. The *eikon* of Christ inspires a waiting and longing for his final appearance, typified in the earliest recorded Christian prayer, Maranatha, “Come, Lord!” (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20).¹² Mary thus turns to the faithful with the features of one who been found among those who “look upon the one whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37). She is an anticipation of the promised “face to face” vision (1 Cor 13:12), for already the God of light has shone in her heart “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

These brief evocations of the “saturated phenomenon” of Mary in the life of the Church—in relation to the event, the radiance, the flesh, and the face of Christ—have a certain equivalent expression in the Anglican-Roman Catholic document, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2004).¹³ She is “the pattern” of grace and hope. She belongs to the “celebration of important aspects of our common Christian heritage”, as the “exemplar of faithful obedience”, the expression of “grace-filled response” to the divine intention to unite all in the “body of Christ”. As such, she is “the figure of the Church” as open in “receptivity” to the Spirit—a point of “convergence” in the worship of “a vast

community of love and prayer".¹⁴ The document looks back to common Christian traditions and the Trinitarian and ecclesial dimensions implied.¹⁵ Inherent in such common traditions is the forward-looking "eschatological" significance of Mary for Christian faith and hope.¹⁶ All such considerations figure in a "re-reception" of Marian doctrine in the interests of a deeper ecumenical consensus. Since this would imply, along with the necessary historical and theological studies, a greater attentiveness to the experiential roots of faith at the level of mind, heart, feeling, imagination and responsibility, I have reflected first on a fresh "receptivity" to the Marian phenomenon, the better to enable a re-reception on the level of doctrine.

A freshly "receptive" re-reception becomes necessary when previous forms have become too narrow and ossified. Fundamentalisms, of either devotional or intellectual kinds, bring forth their own kinds of ideological projections and polarisations. The older self-contained Mariology of dogmatic theology can no longer be simply retrieved. It is a matter of finding a new focus within a fresh horizon, expansive enough to allow for the convergence of scriptural witness, doctrinal traditions, liturgy, art and devotion in ecclesial faith.

Though attempting a more phenomenological approach to figure of Mary, I am not stopping short at some form of purely aesthetic appreciation of the impact of Mary on Christian consciousness. Hence, the importance of emphasizing that, from beginning to end, Mary is situated within the summons of Christian conversion to the reign of God as Christ proclaimed it. She stands therefore within the salvific economy of God's self-revelation. Within this theocentric focus, a fresh receptivity to the Marian phenomenon will work as a *reprise* and a "re-presentation" of the theological themes embedded in Christian story of grace and salvation, in the particular manner in which she receives and gives. Within this "trajectory of grace and hope", the entire sweep of salvation

history comes into focus: creation, the election of the Chosen People, the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, the gift of the Spirit in the Church, all leading to eternal life and creation transformed.¹⁷ If Christ is the Yes to all God's promises, and the Amen to all our prayers (2 Cor 1:18-20),¹⁸ Mary appears in the radiance of the divine affirmation of our humanity, just as her *fiat*, "Be it done unto me according to your word", (Lk 1:38), is a radical endorsement of the Amen of the human surrender to the ways of God.

2. Doctrinal Development: The Marian Catalyst

While a more refined receptivity to the Marian phenomenon means more than a synthesis of the Church's Marian doctrines, the figure of Mary cannot be abstracted from doctrinal developments and the intertwining of Trinitarian, Christological and ecclesial questions. It was not until the 5th century, in the Council of Ephesus (431), that Mary was declared to be *Theotokos*, the "God-bearer", the Mother of God. A huge doctrinal development had been in progress over those five centuries, as is evidenced in the early councils of Nicaea (325), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). The issue turned on the distinctive truth of Christian faith. How were Christians to speak of the divine reality itself? Was God personally revealed in the incarnation? Was the incarnate Word truly and personally human, or merely gesturing in a figurative humanity? In fact, Christian thinkers, in their various attempts to answer such questions, went some of the way with the great pagan philosophers who had formed the culture in which Christian theology operated. Both Christian theologians and pagan philosophers had one common concern. Both wanted to lay to rest the lurid, polytheistic extravagances of ancient mythologies, and so to concentrate on the one, true, good ultimate reality from which everything came. But the intelligence of faith could not rest there. It had to account for the distinctive reality of what had been revealed; and, to that degree, to go beyond what even the best of what Greek philosophy had to offer. The faith, that

through these early centuries had prayed, celebrated, suffered and pondered its mysteries, led to an understanding of God in completely un-Greek terms. Not only was God the creative source of the universe, but lovingly related to the world. There was indeed only one God. However, that one God was never solitary in perfection, but existed in the life of Trinitarian communion, three divine persons inter-related in an eternal vitality. This divine Trinity not only freely created the world, but had lovingly reached into the world in order to draw it into God's own life—so that God would be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).¹⁹ Furthermore, if the revealed God were so self-giving, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, how must faith speak of the “self” that God had to give? In the light of Christ's resurrection, everything about God, our world and our humanity—and about Mary—had to be re-evaluated and re-imagined. Indeed, unless Christ had risen from the dead, there would be no New Testament, no Church, no Trinitarian doctrines, and no Marian presence to Christian faith and hope.²⁰

The confession of Mary as *Theotokos* occurred at a vital juncture in the development of Church teaching of the one person of Christ, true God and true man.²¹ His humanity was not an apparent or “docetic” humanity, for he was truly born of a human mother—“consubstantial with the Father according to his divinity, and consubstantial with us according to his humanity” (Chalcedon, 451).²² At the same time, her virginal conception by the Holy Spirit²³ pointed to the divinity of her son—and the unique dignity of Mary's role in the incarnation. Because Christ is one person, Mary was not merely the mother of his humanity, but truly the mother of the divine person who had entered human history: she was the mother of the Word incarnate.²⁴ In the words of Chalcedon, “One and the same Son ... was begotten from the Father before the ages as to the divinity and in the latter days for us and our salvation was born as to the humanity from Mary the Virgin Mother of God”.²⁵ In this doctrinal development, Mary, as the Virgin-Mother of the Incarnate Word, was understood not as a

mythological regression, but as the focal point in the elaboration of the reality of the incarnation.²⁶

The confession of Mary as *Theotokos*, as the virginal God-bearer, was both the stimulus and the product of intense theological efforts to clarify what the Church actually believed and meant in its fundamental Trinitarian and Christological faith. In reference to her, the great poem of Christian faith found a doctrinal vocabulary consistent enough to enable it to break free from pagan myths and traditional philosophy. There could be no going back to the goddess-worship that Israel had rejected when it encountered the fertility goddesses and the practices of ritual prostitution of its surrounding regions.²⁷ In New Testament times, Paul's preaching had provoked fierce reaction in Ephesus (Ac 19:23-41). His preaching of the Gospel threatened the cult of Artemis (or Diana as she was called in Rome). Demetrius, the silversmith who had a piece of the roaring trade in statuettes of the goddess, denounced Paul and his associates for undermining the local temple worship – and so for posing a threat to his profits: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Ac 19:34) was the indignant slogan. But the Christian veneration of Mary, emerging as it did from the texts of the New Testament itself, did not regard her as a new temple goddess, nor as female substitute for the deity.

In short, Mary is an icon of the divine, one in whom the light of God shines through; and so, not as an idolic projection of human fabrication. She belonged to a different order of reality. In the unfolding of revelation, she had her own place. It was never doubted that she was a finite, human being. She was an historical woman. Though she, along with everyone else, was redeemed, she occupied a unique position in God's saving design. She stood at the point where the light shifted. As the theology of God developed, so did a theological understanding of Mary and its consequent devotional affectivity find its centre and personal focus.

But with the Reformation in the 16th century, Marian doctrines and devotions became a source of division, despite Luther's keen theological appreciation of Mary and his inspiring commentary on the *Magnificat*. The besetting problem, of course, was what was perceived as devotional excesses taking away from the sole mediation of Christ. Later still, the snag was Catholic ecclesiology as the Magisterium proceeded to define as solemn doctrines of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950)—which, to the Protestant mind, had no clear scriptural basis. A more theological and ecumenical shift in the Catholic receptivity to the Marian phenomenon occurred in efforts to integrate the mystery of Mary into the life of the Church, as in chapter 8 of the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.²⁸ Paul VI sought to remove any implication of diminishing the role of Mary soon after the end of Vatican II, and to place Mary in the larger context of grace, Christ and the Church, with his Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultus* in 1974.²⁹ John Paul II, intensely Marian in his spirituality (cf. the Marian significance of his motto, *totus tuus*), in his *Redemptoris Mater* (1987),³⁰ offered a deeply contemplative exposition of the both conciliar teaching in relation to a wide field of biblical data, and voiced the ecumenical significance of the role of Mary for Christian faith. One fruit of this new receptivity was the ARCIC document, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*.

3. Key Terms in the Marian phenomenon

In this respect, the Marian phenomenon occurs as the matrix of four converging perspectives. Mary is given to faith:

- in her relation to the *dramatis personae*, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, of God's Trinitarian self-revelation;
- as participating in the paschal enactment in the death and resurrection of Christ;
- as belonging to the sacramental actualisation in the Church throughout history;

- as anticipating the eschatological realisation of God's design.

Seven evocative (and irreplaceable, even if equivalent) theological terms interplay within the language of faith: Father, Son, Cross, Resurrection, Spirit, Church, and eschatological fulfilment.³¹ These, in turn, can be related to the Johannine "short formula", "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16).³² What is expressed thereby is the conviction that the love of God is the source, form and end of all existence. The revelation of God's self-giving love was the matrix from which the doctrine of the Trinity emerged within the consciousness of the Church. The doctrinal challenge suggested above consisted in articulating as accurately as possible the meaning of the Johannine statement: "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).³³ It invites an active participation in the revealed mystery with profound epistemological consequences: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 Jn 4:7)

Thus, the theological impact of the Marian phenomenon is manifested in the excess of love implied in:

1. the primordial initiative of the *Father*;
2. the self-giving represented in the *Son*;
3. the unconditional love of the *Cross*;
4. the transformative power of the *Resurrection*;
5. the gift of the *Spirit*, communicated throughout history;
6. the historical and sacramental form of the *Church*;
7. the *eschatological* consummation of the divine design.

Each of these seven terms is evocative of the holographic event of God's self-revelation

as it saturates Christian consciousness. Each of these seven “flash points” in the Christian narrative invites faith to reflect how Mary “shifts the light”, so to speak, and embodies the “transformative summons” that Steiner spoke of. In each case, Mary acts and reveals because she has first received.

4. Seven Evocative Correlations

Father:

The New Testament’s naming of God as *Father* suggests that “God is love” in an utterly original way.³⁴ The source of all creation is God’s eternal and primordial begetting of divine Word, the only-begotten Son. Through the Son, the Father freely conceives of the whole universe, and calls it into existence. In his Word and Spirit, the Father loves everything into being:³⁵ “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). From this first divine person comes the initiative more original than any human effort and preceding all created possibilities of responding or believing. In this regard, God’s primal love is more original than any original sin. It comes before any consideration of human merit or guilt. God’s free grace is determined by no human worth or good work (Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:4-5; Rom 8:28-30; 2 Tim 1:9)

In relation to God as Father, how is Mary a living icon of God’s love? How does the motherhood of Mary affect the Christian understanding of the Fatherhood of God? In the long history of Catholic and Orthodox liturgical and spiritual traditions, an answer is found only on a lived, implicit level. However further articulated, it is ever the case that Mary receives. Through what Catholics have come to call her “Immaculate Conception”, Mary uniquely embodies humanity under the antecedent sway of grace—to be freed from all stain of original sin. The God-ordained destiny of all is eminently expressed in her special giftedness. As St Paul exultantly prays,

Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love (Eph 1:3-4).

The perverse “originality” of sin consisted in its power to infect human history with murderous violence and enmity (Gen 4:1-16). To be preserved free from such complicity in evil means that Mary has nothing within her to close her against others. She is uninfected by the bias of evil and pride. She is originally open to the all-inclusive totality of God’s saving will. Her vocation is to be a purely generative influence in human history. Grace, God’s original and unstinted gift, has destined her to be the New Eve, “the mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20). In Christian terms, she is the Mother of the whole Christ, head and members.

Though gifted with a singular destiny, she is in no sense divine. Every element of her being is God-given; all her grace has been received. As the Mother of Christ, she is creation at its most generative, “Blessed among women”. She is “full of grace” and freed from sin as the chosen associate of the eternally generative Father. Thus, in the fullness of time, she becomes the human Mother of his Son: “For the Mighty One has done great things for me...” (Luke 1:49). Her receptivity to God is the foundation of her gracious relationship to all.

Her receptivity to the Father results in a unique role. To her alone it is given to be the Mother of God, *Theotokos*, the “God-bearer”. To confess her as the Mother of *God* means to acknowledge her as the human mother of the Word made flesh. A distorted, minimalist view of Mary’s motherhood would see her as only the mother of the body or human nature of Christ in the Nestorian sense. But no mother is ever simply a producer of a nature or a body. The physical and generative aspects of motherhood

occur within the world of persons. Because motherhood is interpersonal, Mary is personally related to her son, to the person he is, in his radical identity as “God from God, Light from Light”. The genesis of the universe has needed fifteen billion years. Life has emerged from primitive matter and reaches a luminous peak in human consciousness. The religious searching of Israel’s faith in God at work in all things culminates in her consent to be the mother of Jesus. The One who was in the beginning, within the eternal procession of the Son from the Father, now has a new beginning in the fabric and history of the created cosmos. The eternally begotten Son is really brought forth in her. Through her, he is born into the world of creation, subjected to it. “Born of a woman” (Gal 4:4), he would know poverty, live in surrender to the Father’s will, enter into the risk of living for the Kingdom of God – and suffer the consequences. By having this human mother, the divine Son is not posturing in humanity. He is incarnate, enfleshed, born as the divine Word, into the pain, darkness and joy of human existence. In the womb of Mary, the world holds a divine reality within it: the Mother of Jesus is the Mother of God.

In her bringing forth the Christ in the power of the Spirit, Mary receives and reveals—as an icon of the Father. Through her Immaculate Conception she is located in that realm of mercy in which “God so loved the world” (John 3:16). She gives her consent at the Annunciation to be the Mother of “the holy one” (Lk 1:38). She takes the initiative in visiting Elizabeth and witnesses to the overturning power of God in her *Magnificat*. She brings forth her child and ponders the mysteries of God in her heart (Lk 2:19). Simeon foretells the sword that will pierce her heart (Lk 2:35) if she consent to the transcendent divine purpose to be accomplished through her son. In such ways she is participating in the generative love of the Father. The Father will declare in the moment of the Transfiguration, “This is my beloved Son, listen to him” (Mk 9:7). This divine declaration is echoed in her command at the marriage feast of Cana: “Do whatever he

tells you" (John 2:5).³⁶ Her radical surrender to the self-giving love of God will lead her finally to the Cross. There she stands with the Beloved Disciple. Now that the "hour" of Jesus has come, he gives his disciple to his Mother, and presents her, in turn, to him (John 19:25-27).³⁷ Suggesting her mediating role amongst the earliest followers and blood relatives of Jesus, Luke locates in the community awaiting the outpouring of the Spirit (Ac 1:14). The Holy Spirit who will come from above onto the early Church is the same Spirit that came upon her to enable her to conceive Jesus at the beginning of his human life.

These luminous New Testament perspectives bring Mary into focus as the woman on whom the play of light shifts and intensifies. A light not of this world makes this woman an icon of the generative, life-giving love of the Father. For all the generations that call her blessed, and hear the words of Jesus, "Behold, your mother" (John 20:27) and take her to themselves,³⁸ she expresses in a unique manner the tenderness of God, and invitation to "the perfect love that casts out fear" (1 Jn 4:18). Just as the Father has given what is most intimately his own for the salvation of the world, she has entered into such unreserved self-giving. She brings into the world the One whom the Father eternally begets. In time and place, she gives what the Father has given and in the way that God gives, to offer this Son of the Father and her child for the world's salvation: "God's love was revealed among us in this way. God sent his only Son into the world that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). Thus, Mary figures in the drama of the divine self-giving love intent on bringing life to the world.

Mary's maternal love is the historical human manifestation of the Father's generative love. She is not an idol fabricated by human projections, but a woman in whom the Light shines through. As an icon of the Father in this way, she subverts the religious imagination that would see the ultimate origin in rigidly masculine terms. When the

generative, self-giving love of the Father is disclosed in history through the love of this mother, there are consequences. In the interactions of faith and culture, the whole play of human language and symbolism must be deployed in expressing the infinities of God's life and love. She is "perfect" as "your Heavenly Father" is (Matt 5:48; Luke 6:36). No particular invocation of God, even under the name of "Father", can be so absolutised as to curtail the play of the expressiveness of faith and human experience. The name of God who lives in unapproachable light is hallowed neither by dead metaphors, nor by jaded ideologies. The language of faith must be restlessly imaginative. In the current critical task of exploring the meaning of God as Father,³⁹ theology finds a resource, at once simple and evocative: the motherhood of Mary is a symbol of the Fatherhood of God.

Son:

In the invocation of Christ as the *Son*, the affirmation, "God is love", resonates as an expression of God's unique self-utterance and self-giving. The incarnation in all its aspects is the climactic divine self-involvement in creation. God does not simply intervene by doing something *for* us— "for us and our salvation"—but becomes personally someone *with* us in the sphere of creation. Christ is *Emmanuel*, "God-with-us" (Matt 1:23). The Word is made flesh (John 1:14). The generative love that is the source of all creation gives into the flesh of our existence its most intimate self-expression: "This is my beloved Son: hear him!" (Mk 9:7).

The magi in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 2:11) and the shepherds in that of Luke (Lk 2:16) find Jesus with his mother. And as the Mother of Jesus she embodies the self-giving character of God's love. Yet she gives because she has first received. As the first of the redeemed, she receives all from her Son, for the Word is given into the faith and flesh of her existence. In this receptivity— for apart from him, she, like all believers, can

do nothing (John 15:5) – she is drawn into the most intimate association with her Son’s mission. The Father’s “listen to him!” (cf. Mk 9:7) echoes in her instruction to the servants at Cana, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). The words of Jesus are verified in her: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples” (John 15:8). She indeed bears “much fruit”. She becomes the Mother of Christ, and the mother of all the faithful. Jesus on the cross instructs her, “Woman, behold, your son!” (Jn 19:26). The “son” here is the Beloved Disciple, the embodiment of immediate and unreserved faith. She is now not simply his sister in the new family of God, but his mother: “Behold, your Mother” (John 20:27).

Cross:

The revelation that “God is love” cannot be separated from the dramatic event of the *Cross*. God’s love is disclosed as unconditional and without reserve. It keeps on being love even when exposed to the deepest darkness of the world’s evil. At the point where human malice is most manifest in crucifying the Son, the love that God is, keeps on being love as limitless mercy: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Love at once unmasks and subverts the desperate violence of the loveless.⁴⁰

Here, too, Mary gives as she has received. Greeted by Gabriel as the woman uniquely favoured by God (Lk 1:28, 30), she follows her Son in his mission, and suffers the piercing of soul that Simeon foretold (Lk 2:35). She has been given the Beloved Disciple by the dying Jesus (John 20:26). On her, and on this disciple, amongst those gathered at the foot of the cross as representatives of the new community of faith, the Spirit of Jesus has been given: “Then he bowed his head and handed over the Spirit” (John 19:30). A new community of Christ-like selfless love has been born. It must stand against the violently idolatrous self-promotion of this world and its “ruler” (John 14:30; 16:11), by

witnessing to another form of community and life.

In that community of faith, Mary is invoked as the Mother of Mercy. She represents the gentle, ever-persistent presence of the Reign of God, that other kingdom that owes nothing to the inhuman rule of violence and hatred. When challenged by Pilate, Jesus had answered, “My kingdom is not from here... For this was I born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (John 19:36-37). Jesus’ refers to the realm opposed to the murderous self-justifications of power and pride. Pilate’s unease is evident in his response, “What is truth?” (John 19:38). The self-glorifying power of the world relegates the kingdom of the true God to the unreal. The “real world” is constructed on the self-serving ambitions of ruthless power. Its political vocabulary dare not include words such as compassion, forgiveness, humility, obedience to God, self-sacrificing love... The Beatitudes leave it tongue-tied. It has no time for such “useless”—and dangerous— notions.

But Mary belongs to the truth and has heard its voice. There are those who pray to her, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death”. Their prayer arises from an awareness of the seductive power of evil and the fragility of human freedom. In such a world, love is a scarce resource. If it exists, it is a pact amongst those who in effect reject others outside their circle. But to love as God loves, is to love without conditions or calculations. It is to be vulnerable—in a love that finds its source, support and true measure only in God. In this respect, Mary witnesses to the truth of the love revealed in her Son. By standing before the stark truth of the Cross, she stands against the loveless lie that drives a world of self-enclosure and the exclusion of the powerless. To the degree a culture is permeated by the seven deadly sins,⁴¹ she is something of a threat. Her prayer expresses praise of the God who scatters “the proud

in the thoughts of their hearts". For her, God is the One who brings down "the powerful from their thrones" (Luke 1:51-52). In all these ways, Mary at the foot of the cross is a subversive presence.⁴²

Resurrection:

Only in the light of her Son's resurrection is Mary known to faith. "God is love" in a divinely transformative event. Though love is never reduced to the level of worldly power, it is not ineffective. It is not defeated by the powers that crucified Jesus. Love has raised him from the tomb to be the form and source of the life in a new creation. Lifted up from the earth, the crucified Son draws all to himself (Jn 11:52; 12:32). He is the ultimate embodiment of the "love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:4-8).

How does the resurrection affect our perception of Mary? Paul wrote to his Corinthian audience: "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead? If there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain" (1 Cor 15:12-15). By celebrating Mary's assumption into heaven, faith in the resurrection of the Lord finds a correlative symbol. The power of the resurrection has flowed into the existence of this pre-eminent believer, to transform her whole being and to perfect her mission. In terms of Paul's indirect description of risen existence (1 Cor 15:42-58), Mary is no longer subject to the rule of death, nor to the dishonour inevitable in the realm of worldly glory, nor to the weakness that worldly power consigns it. Her transformed existence is no long enclosed in the spiritless materialism of a world undisturbed by the creative imagination of God's Spirit. In her union with her Son, "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), she exemplifies faith in its radical, defiant and universal hope: "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all

people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died" (1 Cor 15:19).

In the power of her Son's resurrection, Mary now lives and acts: "Surely, from now on, all the generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Mt 22:32). She lives, acts, and continues to act, from the heart of God's transforming love through intercessory prayer and compassionate involvement in the great travail of creation (Rom 8:22). Invoked as Our Lady Help of Christians, as the Mother of Mercy and of Grace, as the Mother of Perpetual Help – indeed, in all the invocations of the Litany of Loreto – she is related to all in the communion of saints. She anchors faith, inspires hope, and exemplifies the "love [that] never ends" (1 Cor 13:8). Assumed into heaven, she collaborates with the New Adam as the New Eve in a maternal relationship with all believers.

Mary of Nazareth is the name of an historical person. Yet history has no record of her except through the documents of faith, above all the Gospels of the New Testament, and in what has been written in the hearts of believers through the ages. She is known to faith through its awareness of the universal transformation anticipated in the resurrection of her Son. She stands where the light has shifted in human hope; where the power of death and evil has been overcome.

Spirit:

"God is love" by communicating the gift of the *Spirit* to every age. The love that originated in the Father, that is incarnate in the life, death and resurrection of the Son, is breathed into history as a liberating life-force. The Breath of God is the divine atmosphere invigorating the life of believers in every time and place. In the Spirit, "the Lord and giver of life", Christ was conceived, the Church brought into being, and all

creation moves in a new energy toward its fulfilment (Rom 8:26).

How is Mary linked to this gift of the Spirit? Through the Spirit, the Father begets the Son in eternity. Through the Spirit acting in Virgin Mary, the Father begets his only Son in time. In the words of Gabriel, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35). God’s self-giving love is not restricted or conditioned by what creation can produce in terms of human reproduction or generation. Her virginal maternity discloses the incalculable initiative of the Spirit in regard to all the children of God, “who were born, not of blood or the will of the flesh or the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). In confessing her precisely as the *Virgin Mary*, faith acts in adoration of the imaginative power of God to bring forth the new. It culminates in the reality of God-with-us—definitively in the Word made flesh, derivatively in everyone who “is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Where the Breath of the Spirit plays, it transforms all it touches, including this Jewish woman, Mariam. She receives the Spirit, yet acts in the power of this divine Gift, for she has been chosen to be the created human collaborator in the incarnation itself. Her virginal maternity is a unique “manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). By the power of the Spirit, Jesus is conceived, to be born of the Virgin Mary. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, faith defines her being: she is pure receptivity to the Spirit, pure attention to the Word, pure adoration of the Father: “My soul magnifies the Lord...” (Lk 1:40). She is defined in no other way, by no other relationship – neither by a human partner, nor by social expectations, nor by human ambition, nor even by the common religious notions of her time or ours. What determines her existence is solely what God can be and what God can do. She is the woman who most intimately knows that “for God nothing is impossible” (Lk 1:37). Yet, in her Spirit-formed existence, divine freedom collaborates communicates with a created freedom. Divine Love calls forth a human love to be its partner in the world’s transformation.⁴³

In the horizon that refuses to impose any limits on the Spirit and the divine imagination, the Blessed Virgin Mary is invoked in the faith of the Church. In this she stands at the point where the new covenant promised by the prophets of Israel is realised: "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33. Cf. also, Ezek 36:25-28). Her virginal maternity has its meaning only within the universe of grace. At this point, faith must learn its own reserve. There is no place for any form of theological voyeurism. All efforts to reduce God's "impossible ways" to the humanly familiar are in vain. Her identity is disclosed only in the light of the resurrection of her Son and in the consequent outpouring of the Spirit. She is named only in the vocabulary of a new language speaking, with defiant hope, of the world's transformation in Christ. She belongs to the realm where love is revealed as the power at work to make all things new.

When faith turns to Mary, it recognises her unique role in God's self-communication to the world. The Spirit, active in all creation and throughout the "all generations", brings the world and its history to a unique point of freedom in this woman. She consents on behalf of creation to receive into itself the mystery from which all existence derives. In her free consent to what God is to bring about, she is the world's overture to the power of the Holy Spirit. All the faithfulness of generations before her and after her, all their waiting on God and their yielding to the Spirit, are condensed in her act of self-surrender: "Be it done unto me according to your Word" (Lk 1:38).

In this "Virgin Daughter of Sion", all the hopes and faith of her people are condensed. Elizabeth, summing up the Old Testament praise of the faithful, proclaims, "Blessed is

she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk 1:45). She stands both at the culminating point of the past history of divine promises, and at the beginning of their unheard-of fulfilment. Through her unconditional yielding to what the Spirit alone can accomplish, the Word adored in her faith is conceived in her womb. Henceforth, her whole life and destiny are bound up with her Son and his mission. The virginal motherhood of Mary expresses two essential and related aspects of divine action. First, the Holy Spirit is not reducible to any created power; and, secondly, God acts within the powers and freedom of creation. The incarnation of the eternal Word comes about from beyond, and yet it occurs from within the realm of creation through human cooperation. Precisely because the divine power so transcends the created order, it can work so intimately within to it. Though the Son is incarnate by the power of the Spirit, he is still truly "born of the Virgin Mary".

Church:

"God is love" looks to an historical and identifiable embodiment from generation to generation in the *Church*. In the pilgrim, sacramental reality of Church, the saving mystery is celebrated and offered to the world. As it mediates Christ to the world, the ecclesial community is an open circle. It lives from, and witnesses to, the grace at work in all lives. It can be considered as that part of world which has woken to the superabundance of God's love.

Standing at the foot of the cross, Mary stands at the foundation of the Church. In the revelatory event of the Cross the figures of the Eve, Church, Mary and Christian discipleship interweave. The first woman was taken from Adam's "rib" (Gen2:22, *pleura* LXX) and became the mother of all the living (Gen 3:20). So, too, is Mary in the new community of the Church is the mother of all who receive the gift of eternal life

from the water and blood flowing from the pierced side (again, *pleura*, literally “rib”) of the Crucified Jesus (Jn 19:34), and from the Spirit he breathes forth (Jn 19:30, 20:22, cf. 1 Jn 5:8). In this Johannine perspective, Mary is both the archetype and first realization of the Church.⁴⁴ Her unconditional Yes to the design of God takes her to the Cross, and to her place in the community of the disciples, as they await the outpouring of the Spirit that had so possessed her from the beginning (Ac 1:18). She is a personal symbol of the Church’s corporate identity.

Mary is a luminous presence in the “cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1) permeating the atmosphere of faith, a focal presence in the great “communion of saints” gathered in praising the God of all gifts (cf. Rev 6:9-11; 7; 8:3-4). In her, the Church finds its paradigm and exemplar of what it is called to be, “So that she may be holy and without blemish” (cf. Eph 5:25-27). In union with the Mother of the Redeemer, “Mother Church” contends with the antagonistic powers of the world. The history of evil, of the Antichrist, contends with “a great portent in the heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She is pregnant and crying out in birth-pangs in the agony of giving birth” (Rev 12:1-2). A new creation is being born.

Despite the jumbled ambiguity of the actual community of saints and sinners, the Church possesses an unfailing generative holiness: “Holy Mother Church”. Like Mary, and in union with her, the Church is holy only because God is holy, because the Body of Christ is holy, and because the all-creative Spirit is holy. In the depths of its life, the Church inhales the Holy Spirit. Such holiness does not fail. The inexhaustible source of the Church’s holiness is already realised in Mary and the “holy ones”, the saints and the great company of the apostles, martyrs and faithful witnesses in every age. Their influence precedes and accompanies, sustains and blesses the often sorry efforts of the

Church in any era.

In all that she has received, in all that she is now for us, Mary is the living, acting embodiment of the God-given holiness of the Church. Whatever the sins of us Christians, individual, political or social, whatever the failings of our institutional leaders, it is only in the Church that we first met Christ, heard the Gospel and celebrated the Eucharist. Mary invites us in every age, even in the face of scandals of all kinds, to be open to the whole reality of the Church. It is always a temptation to become so censoriously fixated in some distorted fragment of the ecclesiastical reality that the holiness of the Church drops out of consideration. Scandal can be a convenient excuse for not being involved in the flesh-and-blood history of faith – with all its demands, risks and ambiguities – by hiding behind our own projections of unliveable excellence. It is possible to become all too anorexic in our appreciation of the Body of Christ in history. The temptation is to invent a self-justifying private religious “purity”, isolated from, and even against, the corporate, pilgrim existence as the Church. A Marian sense of the Church helps faith to keep a sense of proportion. Its confession of the “holy Church” confronts believers with the grace of God far more humanly incarnate in our midst than any kind of precious, irritated moralism can perceive. Mary is not a compensation for a lack of holiness, but a living invitation to conversion, for she already embodies the holiness to which are called.

Eternal Life:

Finally, “God is love” as gathering believers through Christ and the Spirit into “the life of the world to come”. Love is at work to bring creation to its fulfilment. The creative source of all that is has made time for the emergence of the world and for the enactment of the whole drama of human freedom. The self-giving love of God is pulsing in every moment of the world’s history. It has been active in every event and human agent. It

has guided the complex dynamics of this emerging cosmos. All along, God's love has been intent on that final moment of fulfilment in order "that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). God is love, therefore, as the first and last word on the divine destiny of all creation, moving towards its final consummation and unveiling. Christ is risen, and "behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17).

Ambrose of Milan sums up the cosmic scope of what has taken place: "In Christ's resurrection the world arose. In Christ's resurrection, the heavens arose; in Christ's resurrection the earth itself arose".⁴⁵ In this eschatological perspective, Mary's Assumption is the realisation of her full-bodied possession of eternal life. Here, as in all else, Mary receives from Christ. In anticipation of this universal transformation, Mary, "assumed body and soul into heaven", is already taken up into the glory of Christ. As with all the grace of Mary, the Assumption is not an exclusively Marian privilege, but the anticipation of transfigured creation and the destiny of the Spirit-charged world.⁴⁶ She is the paradigm instance of creation surrendered to the God who transforms all in Christ. Both the generativity and the destiny of God's creation are revealed in her for, as the Advent antiphon has it, "the earth has been opened to bud forth the Saviour".

The seer of the Apocalypse invites faith into the vision of "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:1-3). As the Spirit descended on Mary to make her the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, and as she is assumed into glory, the great cosmic marriage is begun. The Spirit has formed in her the particular beauty of creation in the sight of God. In her consent to be the Mother of Christ, history has reached its age of consent—in surrender to the transcendent love for which it was destined (cf. Eph 5:21-33; Rev 21:9). Out of such a union, the whole Christ of a transfigured creation is born.

Conclusion:

By reflecting briefly on seven evocative and irreplaceable terms (*Father, Son Cross, Resurrection, Spirit, Church and eternal life*), we have attempted evoke something of the “saturated” character of Mary’s presence to the Church. In the matrix of this manifold phenomenon, we have suggested something of the meaning of Marian doctrines and symbols guided by the most fundamental of all Christian affirmations, “God is Love”. While the focus of Christian hope is on Christ’s death and resurrection, in Mary it has both a *reprise* and “re-presentation” in anticipation of what is to come. In her, hope celebrates the grace of God, given, received, and working its transformation. In their communion with Mary, Christians become more deeply receptive to the sweep and scope of the unfolding of mystery of mercy “from age to age to those who revere him” (Lk 1:50).

¹ This is an extensive reworking of an article originally appearing under the title, “Mary and the Creed: Icon of Trinitarian Love”, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004):17-30. I am grateful to the editor of the aforesaid journal for permission to revise the article concerned and to develop it further.

² The number of male and female religious orders/ congregations is a massive phenomenon in its own right. Examples are close at hand: the Marists (the different Societies of Fathers, Brothers, and Sisters), The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, The Presentation Sisters, the Sisters of Mercy, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Servites—where do we stop, since practically every known religious order/congregation boasts of a Marian inspiration?

³ John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*,
<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae_en.html>

⁴ For a seminal article, see Karl Rahner, “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology”, *Theological Investigations IV*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1966), 36-73.

⁵ In have treated these points more extensively in *The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008). As the title implies, the book was primarily focused on the phenomenon of the Resurrection of the Crucified One, but the “effect” permeates all Christian life and thought. See especially, chapter 2, “A Phenomenological Approach to the Resurrection”, 24-43.

⁶ Jean-Luc Marion’s influential trilogy, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and*

Phenomenology. Trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press (1998), *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Barraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). For further elaboration and background, see *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1991).

⁷ See Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect*, 29-42 as it calls on Marion, *Being Given*, 234-236.

⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics I: Seeing the Form*. Trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Joseph Fessio, SJ and John Riches (eds.) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982); David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁹ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 143.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*:

Mary, as the Mother of Christ, is in a particular way united with the Church, "which the Lord established as his own body"... It is significant that the conciliar text places this truth about the Church as the Body of Christ... in close proximity to the truth that the Son of God "through the power of the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary." The reality of the Incarnation finds a sort of extension in the mystery of the Church-the Body of Christ. And one cannot think of the reality of the Incarnation without referring to Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word (n. 5).
<<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater_en.html>>

¹¹ Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, 185.

¹² Marion, *In Excess*, 124.

¹³ <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20050516_mary-grace-hope-christ_en.html>

¹⁴ From *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, Introduction:

Our Agreed Statement concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary as **pattern** of grace and hope is a powerful reflection of our efforts to seek out what we hold in common and celebrates important aspects of our common **heritage**. Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, **stands before us as an exemplar** of faithful obedience, and her "Be it to me according to your word" is the grace-filled **response** each of us is called to make to God, both personally and communally, as the Church, the **body** of Christ. It is as **figure** of the Church, her arms uplifted in prayer and praise, her hands open in **receptivity** and availability to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that we are one with Mary as she magnifies the Lord. "Surely," Mary declares in her song recorded in the Gospel of Luke, "from this day all generations will call me blessed."

¹⁵ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*:

This tradition has at its core the proclamation of the Trinitarian 'economy of salvation', grounding the life and faith of the Church in the divine communion of Father, Son and Spirit. We have sought to understand Mary's person and role in the history of salvation and the life of the

Church in the light of a theology of divine grace and hope. Such a theology is deeply rooted in the enduring experience of Christian worship and devotion (n. 4).

¹⁶ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, n. 52.

¹⁷ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, n. 6.

¹⁸ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, n. 5.

¹⁹ See Anthony J. Kelly, 'Mystery and Definition', in *The Trinity of Love. A Theology of the Christian God* (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, 1989) 59-64.

²⁰ See Kelly, *The Resurrection Effect*, 44-78.

²¹ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, n. 31.

²² *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (revised edition), J. Neuner SJ and J. Dupuis SJ (eds.) (London: Collins, 1982), n. 614-615.

²³ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, n. 33.

²⁴ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, n. 34.

²⁵ *The Christian Faith...*, n. 624.

²⁶ By the end of the 5th century, commemoration of Mary as "God-bearer" had become practically universal in the liturgies of East and West. The earliest prayer to Mary dates from the mid 3rd century: *Sub tuum praesidium, sancta Dei Genetrix*, while the doctrinal developments of Ephesus and Chalcedon found an enduring prayerful expression in the Akathist hymn to "Our Lady the God-bearer and Virgin Mother". By the end of the 4th century, churches began to be dedicated to Mary and a variety of feasts celebrated in the liturgy. (See *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, n. 39-40).

²⁷ See the informative section of George Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996, 221-247): Canaan and Syria had Anath, Astarte and Asherah; the Babylonians venerated Ishtar, while Phrygia had Cybele, the Great Mother; whereas Egypt revered quite a pantheon of female deities (Hathor, Matit, Medfet, Wadjet, and the goddess of learning, Nekhbit, and, above all, Isis).

²⁸ The aim was to "to explain carefully both the role of the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Word Incarnate and of the Mystical Body, as well as the duties of the redeemed human race towards the God-bearer, mother of Christ and mother of humanity, especially of the faithful" (*Lumen Gentium*, #54). This more patristic emphasis on the Christological and ecclesial placed Mary in the broader context of Church life and faith (#68-69) as a sign of hope and encouragement for the pilgrim People of God.

²⁹ Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, (AAS 66 (1974) 113-168). Note also the preceding documents, the Encyclical Letter, *Christi Matri* (AAS 58 (1966) 745-749), and the Apostolic Exhortation, *Signum Magnum* (AAS 59 (1967) 465:475).

³⁰ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*.

³¹ I have chosen this particular order for present purposes, while acknowledging that any of them can be the starting point with a different ordering as a result. I would emphasise, however, that no one of these terms (or its equivalent) can be omitted from any account of Christian faith, without causing a serious distortion.

³² Bernard Sesboüé, 'Le Groupe des Dombes: Marie dans le dessein de Dieu', *Etudes*, No. 3884, Avril 1998, 513-519.

³³ See Kelly, *The Trinity of Love...*, 141-173.

³⁴ See Anthony J. Kelly and Francis J. Moloney, *The Experience of God in the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist, 2003), 389-394.

³⁵ Note, of course, the sheer gifted quality of God's love: it presupposes nothing, so that "the love of God is ever creating and inpouring the goodness of things" (*amor Dei est creans et infundens bonitatem in rebus*). See Aquinas, *STh* 1, q. 20, a. 2).

³⁶ Kelly and Moloney, *The Experience of God...*, 69-70.

³⁷ Kelly and Moloney, *The Experience of God...*, 364-368.

³⁸ Kelly and Moloney, *The Experience of God...*, 365-366.

³⁹ Anthony J. Kelly, ' "Come to the Father": A Theology of the Fatherhood of God', *The Australasian Catholic Record* lxxvii/3, July 1999, 281-291.

⁴⁰ On this theme, following the thought of René Girard, Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled. Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

⁴¹ Traditionally listed as pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth.

⁴² See René Coste, *The Magnificat. The Revolution of God* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1987).

⁴³ See Anthony J. Kelly, *An Expanding Theology. Faith in a World of Connections* (Sydney: E. J. Dwyer, 1993), 171-2.

⁴⁴ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, n. 27.

⁴⁵ *De excessu fratris sui*, bk 1. PL 16, 1354.

⁴⁶ See Karl Rahner, "The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption", *Theological Investigations I*, trans. C. Ernst (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), 215-227.

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