

MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

H. J. Graf, S.V.D.

The Title "Mother of the Church" at Vatican II

At the beginning of Vatican II the commission on faith and morals gave to the Council Fathers a long document of eleven chapters and an appendix, the latter with the title "The Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Men." But there was no opportunity during the first session (1962) to discuss this appendix. For the second session the same appendix was presented to the Fathers as an independent document with the new title, "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church." But during the same session (October 26, 1963) the Fathers voted against an independent Council document on the Blessed Virgin. The appendix was to become a part of the Council document on the Church.

For the third session (1964), however, a new draft for the Marian chapter in the Constitution on the Church had been prepared under the title, "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." In the subsequent discussions (Sept. 16-18, 1964) some speakers pleaded for the restoration of the title "Mother of the Church" as the heading of the Marian chapter. Others opposed the draft because of its alleged minimalistic tendencies. The Primate of Poland, Cardinal Wyszyński, backed by the entire episcopate of his country, strongly recommended to giving the Blessed Virgin solemnly the title "Mother of the Church."

The results of the discussion in the Council hall were incorporated by the theological commission into the draft text. Though the approved text of the Constitution on the Church stresses the maternal inclination of Mary to the Church, it avoids the title "Mother of the Church," which, as the spokesman of the theological commission said, is theologically legitimate, but open to misunderstandings, and relatively rarely and used only late in Tradition.¹

¹ The expression "mater ecclesiae" is found for the first time in the so-called Magus-Epitaph from the fifth or sixth century. Its text is a free composition, taking elements from the writings of St. Cyprian. It seems to be certain that the lapicide through an error wrote 'ecclesiae' for 'ecclesia'. The text, consequently, refers to the Church as mother, not to a "mother of the Church". Cf. Johannes C. Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesiae. An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church as Mother in Early Christianity* (The Catholic University of America. Studies in Christian Antiquity, No. 5). (Washington, D.C., 1943), p. 80 f.

Tradition

When Mary is called "Mother of the Church" the term mother is used in a figurative sense; it is an image or comparison. Images of speech and comparisons are true from a particular point of view only.

The writers who, in the Middle Ages, called Mary occasionally "Mother of the Church" were fully aware of this insight. The first who called Mary "Mother of the Church" was probably Berengar of Tours who died in A.D. 1088. His work on the Apocalypse of St. John went for a long time under the name of St. Ambrose. Berengar writes on the Woman clothed with the sun: "The woman mentioned in this passage can also mean the Blessed Virgin who is the Mother of the Church, because she gave birth to him who is the head of the Church." But he adds immediately: "She is also a daughter of the Church, because she is the greatest member of the Church."² Consequently, for Berengar the title "Mother of the Church" does not render adequately Mary's relationship to the Church. It has to be supplemented by the opposing statement that Mary is also a daughter of the Church.

An anonymous work of the Middle Ages (from the early thirteenth century), sees Mary's maternity toward the Church in the context of a variety of meanings of the word mother. "Mary is the daughter of the universal Church is the mother of all living. But Mary seems also to be the mother of the Church, because she is certainly the mother of the Head, and may also most fittingly be understood as the mother of the body. Consequently, the Church is the Mother of Mary, and Mary is the mother of the Church."³

Carol Wojtyla, Vicar Capitular of Cracow, together with Jan Jaroszewics, Apostolic Administrator of Kielce (Poland) argued in a similar way in a paper submitted to the theological commission of Vatican II.⁴ Mary's maternity toward the Church stems from the fact that the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. Mary is the physical mother of Christ, the Head, and therefore also the mother of the members of the Mystical Body. How does the physical maternity of Mary to Jesus turn into the spiritual or mystical

² Pseudo-Ambrosius-Berengaudus-Berengarius, *Expositio in Apocalypsin* 12,3,4; PL 17,960.

³ J.B. Pitra, *Dist. Monast.* 3,174; *Spicilegium Solesmense* III, 130 f, quoted by W. Duerig, *Maria — Mutter der Kirche* (St. Ottilien, 1979), p. 17 and 79.

⁴ *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Vol. II Periodus Secunda* (1963). Pars III (Vatican City, 1972), p. 856.

motherhood towards the Church? Here the two Polish bishops referred in their paper to a written intervention of the Polish Bishops' Conference to the theological commission.⁵ The Polish bishops wrote that there is a double motherhood in Mary, a physical and a moral one. She is the physical mother of Jesus whom she conceived in her womb, to whom she gave birth and whom she nursed and raised. In a moral sense she is the mother of all whom Christ redeemed, the mother of all whom Christ was to acquire with his precious blood with the aim to make them one with himself in his Mystical Body. Therefore, Mary is at the same time the (physical) mother of Christ the man, and the (moral, mystical or spiritual) mother of men. She is the physical mother of the Head and the spiritual mother of the members of the Body.

In this theological deliberation the image of the Mystical Body is of utmost importance for the understanding of Mary's motherhood toward the Church. For Bishop Wojtyla it is not a mere image of the Church; it is a closer determination of the very nature of the Church from a Christological, Incarnational and Soteriological point of view.⁶

Not only the term mother but also that of church has a double meaning. We are accustomed to see the Church as that pre-existing community which receives new members. We think of this community as the mother of those whom she has born in the sacrament of baptism, the baptismal font being considered as her maternal womb. Here the Church appears as the spiritual mother of the faithful. If we consider the Church in this sense, then we cannot attribute to Mary the title "Mother of the Church." If we understand the Church as pre-existing society, then Mary is not the mother, but a member of the Church. "Mary is holy; Mary is blessed, but the Church is better than the Virgin Mary. Why? Because Mary is a part of the Church, a holy member, an excellent member, a supereminent member, but still a member of the whole body. If she is a member of the whole body, then the body is more than its member".⁷ To this membership of the Blessed Virgin in the Church also Pope Paul VI referred in his closing address at the end of the third session of Vatican II, when he quoted the medieval abbot Rupert of Deutz saying that Mary is "the greatest part, the chosen part" of the Church."⁸

⁵ Ibid., p. 762.

⁶ Ibid., p. 857: "Aliae enim Ecclesiae imagines non tam profunde naturam eius explicant quam Corpus Christi Mysticum, quod plus est quam imago — est enim determinatio ipsius naturae Ecclesiae sub aspectu christologico et simul sub aspectu mysteriorum Incarnationis et Redemptionis."

⁷ St. Augustine, Sermo 25, 7: PL 46, 937-938. Cf. Liturgy of the Hours, Presentation of the B.V.M., Nov. 21, Office of Readings.

⁸ X. Rynne, *The Third Session* (New York, 1965), p. 386.

If Mary would be the mother of the Church as pre-existing society, then she would be — as a bishop during the discussions of Vatican II said — the grandmother of the individual faithful.⁹ Mary, the mother of the Church; the Church in turn the mother of the individual faithful. Here we have one of the main reasons why the majority of the Council Fathers was reluctant to insert the title "Mother of the Church" in the Constitution on the Church.

But if we understand the Church as the sum total of the believers, as the collection of the many faithful, who as lay people and clergy form the members of the Mystical Body, then we can call her legitimately "Mother of the Church."

Here we have the reason why recent popes, like Leo XIII (enc. *Adiutricem Populi*, 1895), St. Pius X (enc. *Ad Diem Illum*, 1904), Pius XI (enc. *Lux Veritatis*, 1932), Pius XII (enc. *Mystici Corporis*, 1943), John XXIII repeatedly in allocutions and even more frequently Pope Paul VI have called Mary "Mother of the Church."¹⁰

In his closing address to the third session of Vatican II in which the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church with its Marian chapter had been promulgated, Pope Paul VI sated solemnly: "For the glory of the Virgin Mary and for our own consolation, we proclaim the Most Blessed Mary Mother of the Church, that is to say of all the people of God, of the faithful as well as of pastors, who call her the most loving mother... "Mary's divine maternity" also constitutes the principal basis for the relations between Mary and the Church, since she is the mother of Him, who, right from the time of his incarnation in her virginal bosom, joined to himself as head his Mystical Body which is the Church, Mary, then, as Mother of Christ, is mother also of the faithful and of all the pastors."¹¹

The Liturgy

In this sense, subsequently, this title has been inserted into the reformed liturgical books of the Church. For the first time this title has its place in the prayer after communion on the solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God ((January 1).¹²

⁹ O. Semmelroth in: H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*. Vol. I (New York, 1967), p. 293.

¹⁰ For references see W. Duerig, *Maria — Mutter der Kirche* (St. Ottilien, 1979), pp. 33-48.

¹¹ X. Rynne, *The Third Session* (New York, 1965), p. 387.

¹² *Latin Missale Romanum* (Vatican City, 1970) p. 163.

Sempalmus Domine,
 laeti sacramenta caelestia:
 praesta, quaecumque,
 ut ad vitam nobis proficiant sempiternam,
 qui beatam semper Virginam Mariam
 Eili tu Genetricem et Ecclesiae Matrem
 profiteri gloriamur.
 Per Christum Dominum.

Father,
 as we proclaim the Virgin Mary
 to be the Mother of Christ
 and the Mother of the Church
 may our communion with her Son
 bring us to salvation.

We ask this through Christ.

The translation of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) glosses over several important points stressed in this prayer after communion. One of the basic Christian attitudes is joy, so that St. Paul exhorts his faithful to "rejoice always in the Lord" (Phil. 4:4; cf. 1 Thess. 5:16). In this attitude of joy (*laeti*) the faithful have received the bread from heaven, which is therefore called "heavenly sacrament."

Christ had said at Capernaum that he is "the bread come down from heaven... he who eats this bread will live for ever" (Jn. 6:58). Quite naturally, therefore, the reception of holy communion leads to the petition that it may bring the communicants to everlasting life. This petition is more concrete, and says more than ICEL's abstract formulation of "salvation."

All sacraments are sacraments of faith.¹³ From the earliest centuries the Church's Creed contains the profession that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, was born in time of the Virgin Mary. In this prayer after communion we refer to this article of faith. Actually, "we glory" (*gloriamur*) in the fact that Mary is the ever-virgin; that she is the Mother of the eternal Father's Son — not only "the mother of Christ" as the ICEL rendition states; that she is the Mother of the Church, because she is the Mother of Christ, the Church's Head. This we profess: Mary is Virgin; Mary is Mother — Mother of God and the Church. This is a fitting profession on the first of January, when we celebrate the solemnity of Mary, the holy Mother of God.

A Votive Mass

Rome approved a Mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church for Poland in 1971.¹³ In preparation of the Holy Year 1975 the Central Commission for the Celebration of the Holy Year published in 1973 a booklet,¹⁴ which contained a Mass in honor of Mary "Mother of the Church." It was made accessible

¹³ Constitution on the Liturgy, art. 59.

¹⁴ *Notitiae* 7 (1971), 389.

to a wider public in English speaking countries in a translation by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy.¹⁵

When the first typical edition of the reformed Latin Missale Romanum (1970) had been sold out, a new, revised and augmented edition was published in 1975 which contained among other elements some new Mass formularies among which was also a votive Mass of Mary, the Mother of the Church,¹⁷ though without the readings that had been found in the booklet for the Holy Year 1975.

The euchological texts and the liturgical chants of this Mass refer frequently to the biblical basis of Mary's spiritual motherhood: to her assent to the incarnation of the Son of God (Lk. 1:26-38), to the wedding at Cana (Jn.2:1-11), to her standing by the cross of Jesus (Jn. 19:25-34) and to her prayerful presence among the disciples waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14). All these readings, together with Gen. 3:9-15.20 (mother of the living) were parts of the Mass for the celebration of the Holy Year 1975.

Entrance Antiphon

Erant discipuli perseverantes
unanimiter in oratione
cum Maria, Matre Iesu (cf. Acts 1:14).

The disciples were
constantly at prayer
with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

After the Ascension Mary associated herself with the nascent Church in prayer for that same "power from on high" (Lk. 24:49) that had over-shadowed herself (Lk. 1:35) when she gave her consent to the redemptive incarnation of the Son of God. She had fostered that same Spirit in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19.51) so that the Word that had been made flesh in her, would sink its roots ever more deeply into the fertile ground of her soul and bring forth a hundredfold fruit (cf. Lk. 8:8). Now as the mother of the nascent Church she is to foster in the Church's members the Spirit of her Son who dwells in the Church as in a temple (1 Cor. 3:16). What she began in her prayer during that first novena in the Upper Room, that she continues as long as the pilgrim Church on earth exists. This was the message of the alternative Alleluia-acclamation in the Mass of Mary,

¹⁵ Ordo Anni Sancti Celebrandi in Ecclesiis Particularibus (Vatican City, 1973), pp. 88-90.

¹⁶ Order for the Celebration of the Holy Year in the Local Churches (Washington D.C., 1974), pp. 82-84 and 132-134. The English translation is taken from this booklet.

¹⁷ Missale Romanum. Editio typica altera (Vatican City, 1975), pp. 867-869.

the Mother of the Church for the Holy Year 1975: "O happy Virgin, you gave birth to the Lord! O blessed Mother of the Church, you foster in us the Spirit of your Son Jesus Christ."¹⁸

Opening Prayer

Deus, misericordiarum Pater,
cuius Unigenitus, cruci affixus
beatam Mariam Virginem
Genetricem suam,
Matrem quoque nostram constituit,
concede, quaesumus,
ut, eius cooperante caritate,
Ecclesia tua, in dilecti fecundior,
prolia sanctitate exsultet
et in gremium suum cunctas
attrahat familias populorum.
Per Dominum.

Father of mercies,
your only Son, hanging on the Cross,
gave us his Virgin Mother Mary
to be our mother also.

Under her loving care
may her children grow
daily in holiness,
so that all mankind
may see in your Church
the mother of all nations.
We ask this.

"Hanging on the cross Jesus said to the disciple whom he loved: 'There is your mother!'" (Jn, 19:26-27)¹⁹ From about the twelfth century on these words of the Lord are used to describe and explain the universal motherhood of the Blessed Virgin. John the apostle is here seen as the representative of the whole of mankind, while Mary is the mother of all those who through faith and baptism have been incorporated into the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. St. Antonine of Florence (+ 1459) used this text as proof for Mary's spiritual motherhood: "What says this man Jesus to Zion, i.e., to the Church? He says, 'Mother,' that is to say, she is your mother. You had a father of mercies.²⁰ Receive now also a mother of mercy and consolation. Zion, behold, here is your mother. O Church, I will that she who is my mother is to be your mother also. She is my natural mother; she is to be your spiritual mother."²¹

From earliest times Mary and the Church have been seen together. Mary is, so to say, an archetype of the Church, both in her virginity and in her motherhood. At the same time we have to retain that Mary is also a member of the Church. Both as member

¹⁸ "O felix Virgo, quae Dominum genuisti, o beata Mater Ecclesiae, quae in nobis foves Spiritum Filii tui Iesu Christi: "Ordo Anni Sancti . . . (Vatican City), 1973), p. 88.

¹⁹ The sentence in quotation marks is one of the alternative communion antiphons of this Mass.

²⁰ See the opening line of this prayer.

²¹ Summa Theologica, Pars IV, Titulus XV, Cap. II (Verona 1740, reprint Graz 1959), Col. 917: "Quid autem dicit iste homo Jesus Zion, id est Ecclesiae? Illud, mater scilicet est tibi: patrem habebas misericordiarum, accipe et matrem totius consolationis et miserationum. Ecce mater tua, O Sion. O Ecclesia, quae est mater mea, volo ut sit et mater tua. Mea est mater naturalis, tua est mater spiritualis." This is part of an explanation of Ps. 87(86):5.

of the Church and as mother of the Church she is deeply interested in the Church. Therefore, "under her loving care" (*eius cooperante caritate*), under her loving cooperation, the Church is supposed to grow in the holiness of her children and in the number of members from all nations and races. In the Latin term *cooperante* the opening prayer stresses the fact that Mary does not act independently but in close connection with her Son in the Church. Weak and pale is here the ICEL-translation when it asks "that all mankind may see in (the) Church the mother of all nations." As a matter of fact, the Latin original asks that the Church may attract to her maternal bosom all nations of the world.

The opening prayer of this Mass is, therefore, mission-minded. It asks that the Church, through the loving care of Mary, our mother — expressed in her intercession — may become fruitful in holiness and grow in numbers. It asks that in the Church's maternal womb, the baptismal font, ever new children may be born to her. These same children are then supposed to grow in holiness to the joy of the Church. Here we must not forget that holiness is one of the Church's essential attributes.

Prayer over the Gifts

Suscipe, Domine, oblationes nostras
et in mysterium salutis converte,

cuius virtute
et caritate Virginis Mariae,
Ecclesiae Matris, inflammemur
et operi redemptionis cum ea
arctius sociari mereamur.
Per Christum.

Lord, accept our offerings,
and make them the sacrament
of our salvation:
By its power
warm our hearts with the love of the
Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church
and bring us closer to her in
sharing the work of your redeeming love.
We ask this through Christ.

The prayers over the gifts usually refer to the gifts prepared for the eucharistic celebration, set apart on the altar, from the realm of everyday life, to become for us the bread of life and our spiritual drink. The Latin *converte* expresses the change that is to take place here: God is to change our earthly gifts into the *mysterium salutis*, the mystery or sacrament of our salvation. This is the petition of the first part of this prayer over the gifts.

Then follows a new one. By the power of this "sacrament of our salvation" (*cuius virtute*) and through the loving care and concern of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church, may we be set aflame, i.e., get a deeper, more intensive love, and thus become more intimately associated with Mary in the work of redemption.

Here the text subtly alludes to the fact that whenever the eucharist is celebrated *opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur*.²² What Mary experienced under the cross "enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her"²³ that we ask in this prayer for ourselves who are now brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, in the moment, when in the eucharistic prayer *opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur*. We want like Mary, to be more intimately associated, we want to take part more actively and sincerely, we want to enter more intensely into the work of our redemption that becomes sacramentally present and accessible to us in the celebration of the eucharist.

The prayer over the gifts continues an idea of the opening prayer, where Mary's association with the sacrifices on the cross is described. We are supposed to become as intimately associated, as deeply involved in the eucharistic sacrifice as Mary was in the sacrifice of her Son on the cross.

Preface

De Maria, forma et matre Ecclesiae.

Vere dignum. . .

aeterne Deus:

Et te in celebratione

Beatae Mariae Virginis
debitis magnificare praekonis.

Quae Verbum tuum immaculato
corde suscipiens

virgineo meruit sinu concipere
atque, pariens Conditorum,

Ecclesiae fovit exordia.

Quae iuxta crucem testamentum
divinae caritatis accipiens,

universos homines
in filios assumpsit,

Christi morte
ad supernam vitam generatos.

Quae, cum Apostoli Promissum
expectarent tuum,
supplicationem suam discipulorum
precibus iungens,
exemplar extitit orantis Ecclesiae.

Mary Model and Mother of the Church

Father, all-powerful . . .

to give you thanks,
and, as we honor
the Blessed Virgin Mary,
to offer you fitting praise.

She received your Word
in the purity of her heart,
and conceived him
in her virgin's womb;
she gave birth to her Creator
and watched over the Church
at its first beginning.

She accepted God's parting gift
of love as she stood beside the Cross,
and so became the Mother of all
the living, her children brought
to new life through the death
of her Son.

One in prayer with the apostle
as they waited for the promised
Gift of your Spirit,
she became the perfect pattern
of the Church at prayer.

²² Const. on the Liturgy, art. 2 — Constitution on the Church, art. 3. — Prayer over the gifts in the Mass of the Lord's Supper and in several other Masses of the Roman Missal.

²³ Constitution on the Church, art. 58.

Ad gloriam autem evecta caelorum,
 Ecclesiam peregrinantem
 materno prosequitur amore
 eiusque gressus ad patriam
 tuetur benigna,
 donec dies Domini gloriosus adveniat.
 Et ideo cum Sanctis
 et Angelis universis
 to collaudamus, sine fine dicentes:

Raised to the glory of heaven,
 she cares for the pilgrim Church
 with a mother's love,
 following its progress homewards
 until the Day of the Lord
 dawns in splendor.
 Now, with all the saints
 and angels
 we praise you for ever:

In the preface the Church praises God for the role he has assigned to Mary in the history of salvation, in the work of redemption. The first statement is that she has "received the Word in the purity of her heart." Why this assertion before the text goes on to praise the Father that he has made her the mother of his Son through Whom and for Whom all things were created (cf. Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3)?

The beginning of all saving activity in which God and man cooperate is faith. Faith comes from hearing (cf. Rom. 10:17). Mary heard the angel's word, answered in faith and was rightly praised for it by Elizabeth (Lk. 1:45). Here we have the reason why St. Leo the Great could say that Mary "conceived in her soul before she conceived him in her body."²⁴ Vatican II echoed this assertion of St. Leo when it stated that Mary "at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body."²⁵ Because of her willingness to accept in faith the message of God communicated by an angel, she was considered worthy "to conceive" the eternal Son of the Father "in her virgin's womb" and "gave birth to her Creator."

In the conception of the Divine Word in her womb she laid, through her consent also the first foundation of the building of the Church, because in Christ, in his humanity we have the beginnings of the Church. Mary fostered in her loving care this "Church" in its first beginnings, from the day of Christ's birth to the time in Egypt and the silent years in Nazareth.

Standing by the cross Mary heard the words: "Women, behold your son!" In faith she accepted this last will and testament of her Son, and thus received all the redeemed as sons and daughters in the place of the Son of God who had deigned to become also her Son. Not only John is given to her in place of Jesus, not only the Son of Zebedee in the place of the Son of God. Here she

²⁴ Sermo 1 in Nat. Domini 2, 3: PL 54, 191, found in the Liturgy of the Hours on July 16 (Our Lady of Mount Carmel).

²⁵ Constitution on the Church, art. 54.

received all those as sons and daughters who were to be united to the death of her Son in the sacrament of rebirth, in baptism (c. Rom. 6:3-9).

According to the opening prayer Mary is the archetype of the Church in her virginity and maternity. Now the preface adds: she is also the Church's model in her prayer, as the image of the bride who, in prayer, addresses the bridegroom,²⁰ as the model of the virgin who is "anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit" (1 Cor. 7:34). She is so intimately connected with Christ, the Head of the Church as no one else. When the community of the faithful is mentioned for the first time in the Acts of the Apostles, it is gathered together at prayer "with the women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14) asking for the Spirit in the days between the Ascension and Pentecost.

A third time in this Mass — after the opening prayer and the prayer over the gifts — the maternal love of the Blessed Virgin is mentioned in the preface. In her glory, Mary joins, so to say, her divine Son who is now "able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hb. 7:25 cf. Rom. 8:34). In her bliss in heaven she does not forget her spiritual sons and daughters of the pilgrim Church on earth. With maternal care she observes their every step on their way to the heavenly homeland. In and through Christ, her Son, she continues to do so until the day of the glorious Parousia dawns, when all the chosen ones will be raised to the glorious resurrection to join Jesus and his glorified mother in the happiness of heaven, in that dwelling which Jesus went ahead to prepare for them (Jn. 14:3).

Communion antiphon

*Nuptiae factae sunt in Cana Galilaeae,
et erat Mater Iesu ibi;
tunc fecit initium signorum Iesus
et manifestavit gloriam suam,
et crediderunt in eum discipuli
eius (Cf. Jn. 2:1.11).*

*There was a wedding at Cana in
Galilee, and the mother of Jesus
was there. Jesus performed the
first of his signs there and
revealed his glory, and his
disciples believed in him.*

Only the first and last verses of this gospel passage are mentioned, though — since they include the entire section — they mean the whole. Mary intervenes with her Son for the couple to whose wedding she had been invited. She appeals to his mercy and love: "They have no wine." Then she turns to the attendants: "Do whatever he tells you."

²⁰ Cf. Const. on the Liturgy, art. 84.

Until the day of Cana Mary had acted as the physical mother of Jesus taking care of her Son. Now she begins to extend her maternal concern to the people around Jesus, to his spiritual body, which, in the course of the centuries, is to grow continuously in number and perfection. For this Body, Mary is to become the mother, doing the same she had done for Jesus in his earthly life. This will come to pass when "the Hour" has come. Cana saw only the humble and silent beginnings of her intercession and exhortation. In the time of the Church it will repeat itself again and again.

Is it not significant that this activity of Mary began at a wedding, at a festival of love? Is it not equally significant that what Mary asked of Jesus was a gift of love in the service of human joy, "wine to gladden the heart of man" (P 104:15)? Perhaps we have in this communion antiphon — suggested by its context — a hint at the precious wine, the Blood of Christ, that Mary had prepared in her "Yes" to the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The event at Cana has also an eschatological dimension; it is an image of the heavenly wedding banquet (cf. Apoc. 19:9). At Mass we "share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem."²⁷ Therefore we hear in the reformed Mass rite before the distribution of holy communion: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Apoc. 19:9).²⁸ Until we reach this blessed supper, in the time of the Church Mary continues to act for us and speak to us in spiritual form. She acts for us. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church calls this activity "intercession" through which Mary procures for us the "wine," the gifts of salvation. Secondly, she speaks to us exhorting us to turn to Jesus, to listen to him, to do what he commands us to do, and to receive the gifts won for us by him. Also to this, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church refers repeatedly.

Prayer after communion

Sumplo, Domine, pignore
redemptionis et vitae,
supplices adprecamur,
ut Ecclesia tua,
materna Virginis ope,
et Evangelii praeconio
universas gentes erudiat
et spiritus effusione
orbem terrarum adimpleat.
Per Christum.

Lord, we have received
the promise and foretaste
of the fullness of redemption:
we pray that your Church,
through the intercession
of the Virgin Mother,
may proclaim the Gospel
to all nations, and fill
the whole world with the presence
of your Spirit. Through Christ.

²⁷ Const. on the Liturgy, art. 8.

²⁸ The reference to the "supper of the Lamb" has been omitted in the ICEL translation of the Mass rite. This deprived the text of its eschatological meaning and explains why so many priests say: "Happy are we who are called to this supper," meaning, this eucharistic celebration.

The prayer after communion is hardly ever a prayer of thanksgiving. It is a prayer of petition, usually for the fruits of holy communion and of the eucharistic celebration as such. These fruits must not only be felt in the life of the individual communicant. They may also have ecclesial dimensions. They may be fruits like those asked for in the communion epiclesis of the eucharistic prayers, where we ask, e.g., that "all of us, who share in the body and blood of Christ, may be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit."²⁹

In the Mass of Mary, Mother of the Church, this ecclesial petition is taken up. After we have received in communion the eucharistic body and blood of Christ as the pledge of redemption and life, we pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole earth, that under the Spirit's guidance and illumination all people may come to the knowledge of the truth through the proclamation of the Gospel.

This ecclesial dimension of the prayers after communion is not very frequent, but it is not entirely missing. It is present especially in the prayers of the Mass formularies for the Universal Church. In the first of these three Masses³⁰ we ask that, sustained and renewed by the Eucharist, we may become a leaven in the world and bring salvation to mankind. The second prayer asks that the work of the Church may continue to make known the mystery of salvation to the poor whom Christ has promised the chief place in his Father's kingdom; (cf. Mt. 5:3). The third postcommunion prayer of these Masses asks that "our work on earth may build" God's "eternal kingdom in freedom." Quite naturally, the same ecclesial dimension is found in the Mass formularies for the Spread of the Gospel.

Such concern for the salvation of the whole world and its final gathering in the one Church of Christ is very fitting theme for the prayer after communion in the Mass of Mary, Mother of the Church. Mary's role is seen here as an auxiliary one (*ope*). She never acts independently. She prayed in the midst of the apostles for the descent of the Holy Spirit who was to teach the Church and bring to its remembrance all that Jesus had said to his disciples (cf. Jn. 14:26). His coming on the young Church was to make the disciples witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Spirit is seen here as the impelling force that sends the apostles into the world for the proclamation of the Good News.

²⁹ Eucharistic Prayer II.

³⁰ The Sacramentary (Catholic Trade Inc., Manila, 1974), pp. 867 ff.

Mary's prayer for the spread of the Gospel and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit over the whole world, did not come to an end on the day of Pentecost. It continues through the time of the Church until the day when the kingdom of God will have reached its fullness. Consequently, the Second Vatican Council concluded its Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church with the petition that "through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles, the nations may be led to the knowledge of the truth as soon as possible (1 Tim. 2:4), and that the splendor of God which brightened the face of Jesus Christ may shine upon all men through the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 4:6) (art. 42).

Toward a special Feast?

The calendar reform after Vatican II aimed, among others, at a reduction in number of so-called devotional feasts,³¹ i.e., feasts which do not commemorate an event within the mystery of salvation, but some particular aspect of one of these events (Sacred Heart, Precious Blood), or of one of the titles of the Lord or Our Lady (Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Holy Name of Mary). It seems that the title of Our Lady as "Mother of the Church" is gradually becoming a liturgical feast of its own. In the meantime the bishops' conferences of Poland and Yugoslavia³² obtained from home the permission to celebrate Mary as Mother of the Church with the rank of feast on Monday after Pentecost. This seems to be a well-chosen day. Many countries celebrate this day as a public, non-religious holiday, as in Great Britain, where it is a so-called bank holiday. Frequently, this day belongs still to the month of May, which is particularly dedicated to the devotion of Mary. The closeness to Pentecost intimates that Mary's role as Mother of the Church is centered around Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. The entrance antiphon, the preface and, in a more subtle way, the prayer after communion refer to Mary's prayer in the midst of the nascent Church for the coming of the Spirit and for the spread of the Church through the proclamation of the Gospel. It remains to be seen whether this is a first step in a development which may eventually lead to the extension of such a celebration to the whole Church.

Much will depend on the man, who, as bishop Carol Wojtyla was so deeply interested in this Marian title during the Second Vatican

³¹ *Calendarium Romanum*. Commentarius (Vatican City, 1969) p. 66.

³² *Notitiae* 15 (1979), 162. For OFM: *Ibid.*, p. 307.

Council, and today as Pope John Paul II continues to venerate the Blessed Virgin as Mother of the Church. He referred to her right after his election, when he presented himself to the City of Rome and to the world on the evening of October 16, 1978. He explained this title in his first encyclical Letter "Redemptor Hominis" where he states both that the Church is a mother and that this Church has need of a mother, and concludes: "I implore Mary, the heavenly Mother of the Church, to be so good as to devote herself to this prayer . . . together with us who make up the Church, that is to say the Mystical Body of her only Son. I hope that through this prayer we shall be able to receive the Holy Spirit coming upon us and thus become Christ's witnesses 'to the end of the earth' (Acts 1:8), like those who went forth from the Upper Room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost" (IV, 22).