

Mary and Modernity

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Abstract and Keywords

Because the Reformation was unfavourably disposed toward expressions of the cosmological, mystical, symbolic, and aesthetic dimensions of the Virgin Mary's spiritual presence, and because secular versions of several concepts in the Reformation became central to emergent modernity, the work of modernizing the Catholic Church at Vatican II resulted in streamlining Mary's presence and meaning in favour of a more literal, objective, and strictly text-based version, which is simultaneously more Protestant and more modern. In the decades since Vatican II, however, the modern, mechanistic worldview has been dislodged by discoveries in physics and biology indicating that physical reality, the Creation, is composed entirely of dynamic interrelatedness. This perception also informs the Incarnation, the Resurrection, Redemption, transubstantiation, and the full spiritual presence of Mary with its mystical and cosmological dimensions. Perhaps the rigid dividing lines at Vatican II will evolve into new possibilities in the twenty-first century regarding Mary and modernity.

Keywords: Virgin Mary, modernity, non-modern Christianity, Vatican II, dynamic interrelatedness

MARY and modernity are expressions of two contrasting perceptions of existence. The modern worldview emerged from a sequence of four foundational movements between the mid-fifteenth century and the late eighteenth century. It began with the neoclassical embrace of the Greek philosophical perception that all beings are essentially separative and that a radical discontinuity exists between mind and body, between humans and nature, and between self and the world. During the following two centuries the Scientific Revolution concluded that physical reality is structured and functions according to mechanistic principles, like a vast clockwork, thus contributing a bedrock of clarity to the modern worldview.

The Virgin Mary is a spiritual presence who embodies relational interconnection, a truth of existence that predates and has outlived the mechanistic worldview. She assented to God's intention to grow the Christ from her body. Her cells became his, her life his birth. She was a Nazarene village woman become *Theotokos*. Hers was a human life that grew

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into and realized transcendent dimensions through her role in Salvation. She was Assumed into heaven and yet is felt to be everywhere on Earth.

To achieve a harmonious coexistence between the nonmodern and the modern perspectives, either Mary would have to be changed or the modern worldview would have to change. The former occurred at Vatican II, the latter in the twenty-first century.

Mary's Role in the Emergence of Modernity

In nearly all of the movements from which the modern worldview emerged, the Virgin Mary was a central focus of attention, often as a strategic target. In fifteenth-century Florence the neoclassical revival of Greek humanism was asserted in the visual arts by dethroning the most widespread image of the medieval Church: the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven. After the mid-1400s Mary is never depicted by Renaissance artists (p. 532) wearing a crown and sitting on a medieval throne. Instead, she is given a thin halo and is seated on neoclassical architecture, a bench more often than a throne, thus signalling a far less esteemed position for her and, by extension, for the Church.

In the Reformation Martin Luther reframed the extensive honouring of the Virgin Mary as theft of glory that should properly go only to God. Therefore, as Luther wrote in his *Commentary on the Magnificat*, we 'must strip her of all honor' (Luther 1956: 322). In Luther's famous *Sermon on the Afternoon of Christmas Day* in 1530, he urged the faithful to 'accept the child and his birth and forget the mother, as far as possible' (Luther 1959: 213). Luther also disallowed a multivalent, immersive spiritual engagement with the sacred through music, the visual arts, poetic prayer, the rosary, chants, rituals, and the wafting scent of incense, opting instead for a strictly text-based religion. In addition, Luther created a new focus on the individual, disembedded from such religious concepts as the Mystical Body of Christ, the enveloping love of the Blessed Mother, the Communion of Saints, and also the communities of nuns, priests, brothers, sodalities, and spiritual fraternities. Rather, the only thing that mattered was the relationship between the individual and God. (The secular version of this new focus on the individual standing alone became part of the emergent modern worldview.)

In response to the Reformation, the Council of Trent's robust defence of a more-than-text-based engagement with the sacred resulted in an exuberant burst of creativity in the arts, including new Marian music and Marian paintings, particularly dramatic Baroque depictions of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the Assumption of Mary. Mariology expanded as did Marian spirituality: new litanies of Our Lady; new Marian devotions, hymns, and processions; Baroque churches and numerous shrines in her honour; and the Marian congregations and fraternities with millions of members.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the discoveries constituting the Scientific Revolution seemed to reveal that the nature of the physical world is entirely mechanistic. The Virgin Mary was not an issue in the Scientific Revolution, but neither was she irrelevant: at least two of the leading figures—Galileo and Descartes—visited the Marian shrine of

Our Lady of Loreto in Italy independently. Each of them signed the visitors' registry, and Descartes wrote a message thanking Mary for illuminating his philosophical direction.

During the eighteenth century in Britain, France, and parts of Germany, rationalism and neoclassicism were seen to complete the West's recovery from the lamentable detour into medieval religiosity. In response, the Catholic Church in those countries deemphasized the glories of Mary as Queen of Heaven while honouring her more rational qualities, particularly as a guiding light of ethics, morality, motherly love, and domestic concerns.

By the final decades of the eighteenth century the foundational elements of the modern worldview had coalesced. At this juncture the revolutionary violence by which the first Catholic culture shifted to a modern secular state shocked the Church and threw it into a defensive posture towards modernity for the next 150 years—with Mary, once again, as a primary symbol in the struggle. At the height of the French Revolution's (p. 533) Dechristianization, in late 1793, all religious observance was outlawed, church bells were melted down for munitions, crucifixes were confiscated, and religious artefacts were destroyed—especially hundreds of medieval and Baroque Marian statues, including the much beloved black Madonnas and Throne of Wisdom statues. Hundreds of priests and nuns were murdered. After Napoleon and Pope Pius VII negotiated the Concordat in 1801, the Church was permitted to exist and function in France but only under control of the modern French state.

The Church's Response to the Secular Modern State, 1830-1962: A Re-Emphasized Spiritual Presence of Mary

With some justification, the Catholic Church felt itself to be under siege by modernity, particularly in France during the decades following the trauma of the Revolution. Since the new modern state had nearly succeeded in eliminating Catholicism in France, might it not do so again at any time? Although constrained by the Concordat, the French Catholic Church sought to recover its collective vitality. But how? The answer began to manifest itself less than three decades into the modern situation.

In 1830 Catherine Labouré, a postulant in the convent of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in Paris, reported seeing several apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the chapel. During the first, the nun heard Mary speak these words: 'God wishes to charge you with a mission. ... The times are evil in France and in the world.' Concern about the modern situation and secularization was again conveyed in Marian apparitions reported by peasant children in La Salette in 1846 and at Fatima in 1917. In the latter, Mary reportedly spoke about the aggressively anti-religion stance of a modern secular state, this time in the form of the emergent communist government in Russia and the spread of Marxism.

In 1854, in response to grassroots enthusiasm and following a consultation with theologians, Pope Pius IX issued an apostolic constitution, *Ineffabilis Deus*, which defined the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary as a dogma of the Church. The implicit message to modern secularization was that Catholicism was not about to recede and that it stood boldly for an expansive spiritual engagement that is the opposite of modernity's reductionist, positivist focus solely on that which can be measured and counted. Almost immediately after this 'people's victory', grassroots pressure was put on the Vatican to declare the Assumption of Mary a dogma of the Church. This dogma was defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950 after the Vatican received twenty million petitions.

(p. 534) **Vatican II: Modernizing the Church—and the Marian Presence**

The clash at the Second Vatican Council over what should be said about the Virgin Mary in the modern age and where such a statement should appear—as a free-standing document or as a chapter within the new Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (*The Light of the Nations*)—resulted from the incompatibility of two deeply held versions of Christianity and, indeed, two different concepts of religion: an expansive, multi-valent, mystical, and cosmological engagement with transcendence and the Divine versus a more historically objective, rational, strictly text-based engagement. The Council Fathers were charged by Pope John XXIII with achieving *aggiornamento*: bringing the Church into the present day, achieving a better fit with the modern age. Because several concepts inherent in the Reformation became foundational, in secular form, in the emergent modern worldview, a move to bring the theology and liturgy of Catholicism closer to modernity would almost necessarily require moving it closer to Protestantism.

That outcome was the intention of several Catholic movements during the 1950s in Germany and environs that held that the streamlined, more rational, and more authentic version of Christianity boldly declared by Protestantism was a model that Catholicism could well emulate. The liturgical, biblical, ecclesiological, and patristic movements (including the *Ressourcement* movement in France) shared a commitment to remove from Catholicism what they felt to be irrational vestiges of medieval religiosity so that a pure focus on biblical and patristic sources could bring renewal to the Church. It was generally held in these circles, known collectively as the 'progressives', that veneration of the Virgin Mary began only in 431 after the bishops at the Council of Ephesus bestowed the title *Theotokos* (God-Bearer, or Mother of God) and that early Christianity in the previous centuries had been largely Mary-less. (Subsequent scholarship, such as that presented in *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion* by Stephen J. Shoemaker (2016), several elements of which were known prior to Vatican II, does not support this assumption; see also *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* by Luigi Gambero, S.M. (1999).) Further, the biblical and patristic movements revived the ecclesiotypical interpretation of the significance of Mary (that she is essentially a type and a member of the Church). Most Catholics worldwide, however, knew little about these movements.

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At the outset of Vatican II, the majority of Council Fathers expected that a Marian document would be produced that would explicate for the modern world the biblical and theological reasons for the Catholic honouring of Mary's intimate participation in the Incarnation and Redemption, as well as her ongoing spiritual presence, and would suggest the ways in which this expansive spiritual communion with Christ and Mary can heal the alienation, loneliness, and fragmentation caused by the modern condition. Other Council fathers, the modernizing 'progressives', were determined that the statement on Mary should be a chapter in the new Constitution that would streamline and (p. 535) 'purify' the significance of Mary and would end the 'isolation' of Marian devotions. Many of them were also critical of Mariology, a discipline they viewed as detached from theology with its own methodology and conclusions they considered of dubious validity (O'Carroll 2000: 232).

To prepare for a vote on the issue, a debate was held on 24 October 1963. Ostensibly the vote and the debate were solely about the location of the Marian document, but the proposed content was also at stake. The defenders of the traditional veneration of Mary as Christocentric, or Christotypical (focusing on her ontological relationship with Christ and her unique co-participation in the Nativity and Redemption, all prior to the Church and constituting her meaning for the Church) were represented in the debate by Rufino Cardinal Santos of Manila, who spoke first. He began with two preliminary observations: that a document on the Virgin Mary is so different in kind from the other chapters in the Constitution that it logically does not belong there, and that placing it there would give the impression that the Church had decided the ecclesiotypical versus Christocentric debate in favour of the former. He then sought to convey the array of rich and historically layered perceptions of the Blessed Mother in the Mystery of her divine maternity, her profound presence in the Redemption, her mediation of Christ's grace, and her loving presence in the inner lives of the faithful. How to express that which is beyond words? At one point he recited several of Mary's resonant titles and alluded to their significance in the spiritual lives of Catholics worldwide. He emphasized that Mary's role was previous to the existence of the Church: 'Mary by the grace of the Redeemer was associated with him in the very objective redemption', making her the first and the principle member of the Church but also preeminent over all under God and so 'somehow above the Church' (Relationes 1963). Moreover, Cardinal Santos observed, 'She was a free instrument and thereby a cause of the Mystical Body which is the Church, and consequently the Mother of the People of God' (Tavard 1996: 203).

That point, however, was exactly what the modernizing progressives rejected. They were represented in the debate by Franz Cardinal König of Vienna, who asserted that Mary is not a 'cause' (through her assent to the Incarnation and being with Christ throughout his life and death and in the movement that followed) nor principally a unique co-participant in the Redemption but, rather, a 'fruit of the Redemption'—like the Church. She can be acknowledged, he allowed, to be 'Christ's most sublime cooperator, through his grace, in perfecting and extending the work of salvation'—but in the manner of the Church (Relationes 1963). In no way was the Virgin Mary to be construed as spiritually superior to the ecclesial institution. Cardinal König, an advocate of the new 'scientific' method of biblical

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exegetes, also rejected the title Mother of the Church on the grounds that it was based on allegories that do not fit the modern way of reading Scripture, which draws from the theory of semiotics and demonstrates that every mention of Mary in the Bible is actually a sign, or cipher, that stands for the Church. For example, all of Mary's titles in the Litany of Loreto should be understood, he asserted, as referring not to her but to the Church as Mother (Tavard 1996: 203). The implication was that Cardinal Santos' moving recitation of Marian titles was mired in theological error.

(p. 536) As for the location of the Marian document, Cardinal König presented four categories of reasons why the statement about Mary should rightly be composed as a chapter within the new Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: (1) the theological reason was that doing so would save the Constitution from making the Church seem excessively institutional—and would also make clear that the Marian statement is consistent with the purposes of Vatican II (to become more modern and to achieve ecumenical rapprochement); (2) the historical reason was that Marian spirituality had reached a doctrinal level solely because of mediation by the Church, so it was historically consistent that the Church should again mediate, this time to manifest the goals of Vatican II; (3) the pastoral reason was that the laity were being encouraged to 'purify' their devotion to Mary and focus on what is essential to it; and (4) the ecumenical reason was that establishing an ecclesiological doctrinal explication of the Virgin Mary would make possible a convergence with the Protestants and the Orthodox. (Yet the Orthodox are at the opposite end of the Marian spectrum from Protestantism and would not favour any drastic reduction in acknowledging Mary's spiritual presence.)

A group of defenders of the Christocentric view of Mary submitted a draft statement entitled *De Mystero Mariae in Ecclesia (On the Mystery of Mary in the Church)*, but it did not get circulated. After five days of lobbying, the vote was conducted. On all other issues requiring a vote the Council Fathers had nearly 90 per cent consensus, but on the issue of the Virgin Mary in the modernized Church they were almost evenly divided. By less than a 2 per cent majority, the modernizers won. Many of the Council Fathers left the hall in tears, mourning the radical diminution of a 2,000-year spiritual tradition. Others, however, celebrated what they considered the long overdue minimizing of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism.

Several drafts were then composed of Chapter 8 for the new Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Pope Paul VI wanted the chapter to be entitled 'Mary, Mother of the Church', but this was disallowed by the modernizing majority among the drafters and their advisors. Instead, the title is 'The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church'. During the drafting Cardinal Santos and his colleagues tried to include statements on the Christocentric understanding of Mary and to emphasize her active 'partnership' (*consortium*) in achieving the work of Redemption. By the final version those passages had been deleted and replaced by a delineation of Mary's significance as a person who 'devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, in subordination to him and with him, serving, by the grace of Almighty God, the mystery of redemption' (*Lumen Gentium* 56). Further, the text notes that she cooperated

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in an altogether unique manner by obedience, faith, and burning charity in restoring supernatural life to souls. The final version omits mention of nearly all of Mary's traditional titles including Mother of the Church. It declares that Mary's titles Mediator and Advocate (since the third century she has been considered the Advocate for the People of God) are henceforth to be understood solely as her maternal charity as a helpful member of the Church. Mary's faithful obedience to God is hailed as the reason she is an exemplary model within the Church.

(p. 537) The chapter is considered a compromise document because it does mention Mary's unique role in the Incarnation and Redemption, but it does not allow that such actions are any cause for special honouring of her beyond admiring her as an inspiring member of the Church. During a final debate, which spanned several days after the last draft was presented on 16 September 1964, Cardinal Santos and his colleagues argued that Mary's salutary and ongoing effect on souls should be stated and explicated, as should her special relationship with the Holy Spirit. They declared that they were not about to allow Mary to be relegated to history (Jelly 1986: 65). But that is exactly where the modernizing side felt she belonged: a simple woman who filled a niche in biblical history. Rationally speaking, what more could a historical woman possibly be? Some sort of maternal spiritual presence located everywhere at once in the imagination of a benighted laity? More than 2000 years after she lived? To the modernizers, the clarity of historically objective thought made the radical reduction of Mariology inarguable. Consequently, this warning appears in the final version of Chapter 8 (*Lumen Gentium* 64): 'Let the faithful remember moreover that true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith ...'.

The larger societal context of the postwar period is relevant to the outcomes at Vatican II. It was a time characterized by a muscular burst of modernity as institutions in all sectors sought to demonstrate tough-mindedness, hard-edged efficiency, and a rationalist mode of operation while rooting out any weak-minded sentimentality, usually seen as feminine. Ironically, the Roman Catholic Church had declined for some 445 years to move in the direction of Luther's streamlined version of Christianity but then opted to modernize itself only twenty-some years before the critique of modernity emerged in intellectual and academic circles in the West. Had Vatican II taken place in the mid-1980s, the full implications of the modern worldview and condition would have been more apparent—not only its progressive achievements but also its tragic losses; its blind faith in rationalist, objectivist, mechanistic thinking; and its disdain towards all non-modern cultures that maintain a holistic, poetic sense of the sacred in the cosmos.

For many years prior to Vatican II, Joseph Kentenich, S.A.C., a German priest who founded a Marian movement called the *Schoenstatt* (Beautiful Place) Movement, directly named 'mechanistic thinking' as the illness of the Western soul in the twentieth century, an inorganic rationality that 'separates, takes apart, and analyses without maintaining context, connections and synthesis'. In modernized theology this trajectory separates Mary from Christ, he asserted, and also separates Mary from the faithful by disregarding their deeply felt communion with her (Peters 2009: 211, 289). The Schoenstatt Movement

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spread from Germany to numerous countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Chile. Even so, the remodelling of Roman Catholicism at Vatican II was undertaken at the historical moment when faith in modern progress was at its zenith—powerful, tough on any traditional perspectives, and utterly unstoppable.

Clearly, Protestantism is more modern than traditional Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity because it banishes spiritual communion through aesthetic immersion and ritual, focuses exclusively thus far more rationally on the text, replaces (p. 538) the expansive sense of symbols with a more proscribed meaning, and denies the ancient religious logic that a woman's growing God the Son from her person would most likely transform her in transcendent ways. These Protestant distinctions may indeed amount to a superior type of Christianity—more direct, more literal, less cluttered—but the *zeitgeist* of enthusiasm for all things modern during the early 1960s precluded a process of discernment by which the Council Fathers might have determined which preferences of modernity should be incorporated into the life of the Catholic Church and which would damage that which is spiritually precious and in need of protection in the modern world. Certainly an attempt was made during the major Marian debate at Vatican II to discuss the collateral damage of the proposed overhaul, but modernity was still trusted by most people then as the powerful engine of deliverance propelling us into a better future. Any objections to it seemed weak, backward, and even somewhat ridiculous.

Mary in the Wake of Vatican II

At the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, the laity was eager to see how the numerous reforms in the four constitutions, three declarations, and nine decrees would affect Catholicism and its relations with the world. It was a time of great optimism, but that was soon tempered for many Catholics by learning of some unwelcome changes. These came as a surprise because the laity had not, in general, been following the numerous votes taken during the three years of the Council. For the clergy, who necessarily hewed closely to the conciliar texts and guidance from their bishops, Mary was suddenly a problem. The Marian prayer *Salve Regina* had been deleted from the new liturgy, and Marian hymns were to be replaced by new songs considered more relevant and not related to Mary. It became clear that spiritual communion with Mary as the unique co-participant in the Redemption and as Mediator of Christ's grace was out of step with the modernized Church. Moreover, Chapter 8 warns that no Marian imagery or devotions should be condoned that might mislead 'the separated brethren' (the Protestants) about the true teachings of the Roman Catholic Church (*Lumen Gentium* 67). Statues and other images of Mary were removed from churches and churchyards, as novenas and group recitations of the rosary were phased out. A long silence about Mary set in.

Every pope since Vatican II has issued statements, pastoral letters, and even encyclicals that seek to soften and reinterpret the radical reduction of Mary's status and spiritual significance for Catholics. That is, without challenging the Marian decisions made at Vatican II, the popes have suggested ways of recovering and maintaining a rich spiritual engage-

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ment with Mary. The first such document was Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation in 1974, *Marialis Cultus: For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in which he cited numerous places in the streamlined liturgical calendar when attention to Mary is called for, and he issued guidelines for restored Marian devotions. In Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (1987), he based each section on a passage from Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium* but explicated the meanings (p. 539) of Mary in ways that allow a more expansive understanding of her spiritual presence. Similarly Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the 23rd International Mariological Marian Congress in 2012, asserted that the title of Chapter 8, 'The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church' means not that Mary is subsumed in or by the institutional Church but, rather, that she is and always has been part of the very *nexus mysteriorum* of the close connection between the mysteries of the Christian faith. Earlier, in an article in 2003, Pope Benedict XVI (then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger) wrote that the Marian vote taken at Vatican II was theologically correct but that the two sides, being nearly equal, should have been regarded as complementary: an integration was imperative but should not have amounted to the absorption of one movement by the other (Benedict XVI 2003). More recently, Pope Francis has made many gestures of support for traditional ways of communing with Mary, such as his canonization of the brother and sister who witnessed the Marian apparition at Fatima in 1917, his support of the Schoenstatt Movement, and his Twitter message on 2 September 2014: 'The Christian who does not feel that the Virgin Mary is his or her mother is an orphan.' In his ecological encyclical letter, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis refers to Mary as 'the Mother and Queen of all creation' (Francis 2015: 155).

The most influential stream of theology at and after Vatican II, however, was the modern perspective known as theological anthropology, in which the individual's experience in the man-made world is seen to constitute the central point of reference for theology. This turn towards the human was pioneered by Karl Rahner, a German Jesuit considered by many to be the foremost Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. He was influenced by Kant and by his mentor, Martin Heidegger. Rahner rejected the notion of an escape to a spiritual heaven after death and dismissed many biblical accounts and spiritual beliefs as mere mythologizing. He asserted that the only way a person can peer into the mystery of God is by experiencing *himself* as the constant process of self-transcendence. It is in the human that mystery is inscribed in the world.

At Vatican II Rahner was an influential advisor in the writing of the Marian chapter in *Lumen Gentium*. In the decades that followed, his example of 'demythologizing' Mary and focusing solely on her actions in the world, specifically as an original member of the Church (Rahner 1963), was enthusiastically taken up by progressive theologians. By the 1990s, feminist progressive theologians began to articulate a different progressive view of demythologized Mary-in-the-world: Miriam of Nazareth was not merely a faithful and obedient member of the Church but a courageous social-change activist who declared the *Magnificat*, travelled 140 kilometres on her own when she wanted to visit her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country, and pioneered Christian theological reflection when she 'pon-

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dered these things in her heart' (Luke 2:19) after Jesus began to act in the world (Cunneen 1999; Johnson 2000).

The foremost American feminist progressive theologian advocating this anthropological perspective is Elizabeth A. Johnson, S.S.J., whose book *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* makes the case for turning away from the 'cultic-spiritual approach' to Mary with its Eastern-inspired 'enthusiastic personal devotion' and its emotional and subjective qualities (Johnson 2003: 40, 118). Instead, Johnson (p. 540) advocates a modern, 'objective' Marian theology, which focuses on 'concrete reality' as the locus of her encounter with God (Johnson 2003: 119, 161). Therefore, this theology includes attention to the type of house Mary probably lived in and the physical conditions of her daily life. Some 'symbolic construal' is necessary in religion, Johnson allows, but this must be 'tethered' in concrete historical fact (Johnson 2003: 100-1). Johnson feels that the traditional use of the medieval honorifics *Our Lady* and *Queen* were not only baseless projections but imposed a 'patronage model' that reduced Catholics to being subjects grovelling before a sovereign. Instead, Johnson advocates a 'companionship model' in which the *Theotokos* is seen to be an ordinary human being during and after the Incarnation—someone just like us (Johnson 2003: 318).

The 'just like us' approach to Mary is presented as liberating her from the accretion of sentimental, emotional projections and allowing her to be her true self. In this light, many progressive theologians reject the Latin Vulgate translation *gratia plena* (full of grace) in the *Hail Mary* prayer, asserting that a more accurate translation of the Greek identifies her as an ordinary person who was chosen: *Mary, most favoured by God*. However, in *There Is No Rose: The Mariology of the Catholic Church*, Aidan Nichols O.P. argues that the Greek word *kecharitomene* denotes causal action (of grace) so is better translated as *You who have been transformed by grace* (Nichols 2015: 9).

In the fifty-plus years since Vatican II a significant divide has emerged geographically regarding the Virgin Mary: grassroots Catholics in Latin America, Central and Southern Europe, and the Philippines have generally resisted the extent of the erasure of Mary that was achieved in North America and Western Europe. In most of the countries that have defended their deeply felt and expansive engagement with her, she is understood to reside at the heart of their cultural identity. Similarly, ethnic parishes in the United States with parishioners from those countries usually insist on maintaining images of Mary, Marian hymns and processions, and devotional practices such as group recitations of the rosary. Because progressives value multiculturalism, most have come to accept these differences on the grounds that people's relationship with Mary is simply cultural.

Marian Aggiornamento in the Twenty-First Century

During every era in the history of Christianity human engagement with the Divine has reflected the deep roots of culture plus the contours of the *zeitgeist*. The miraculous story of the Incarnation is related in the gospels through elements that were familiar to people in the eastern Mediterranean basin at the time: a female gives birth parthenogenetically to a son at the Coming of the Light (winter solstice), who becomes a great leader and dies and is reborn at the Vernal Equinox (Easter being set on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox). These features in the biblical account are found in various earlier religions, although the mother in (p. 541) sacred myth was usually a goddess. Miriam the village girl who becomes the holy mother of the Saviour was unique among sacred narratives in that region.

In the medieval era, all of nature was understood to be unified as God's Creation: the entire universe participates in divine goodness, as St Thomas Aquinas taught in the *Summa Theologica* (Part I, qu. 47, art. 1). The cosmological associations of the *Theotokos*—now Our Lady—seemed obvious to all Christians. Mary was the Moon, existing between the Earth and the Sun/Son. She was the life-giving waters that flowed from sacred springs. She embodied transcendent grace and, as the Star of the Sea, guided believers through the darkness. The expansive, enveloping gestalt of medieval Christianity was a reprise of an extremely ancient perception of holistic interrelatedness.

With the neoclassical revival of the Greek perception of radical discontinuity between body and mind, humans and nature, and self and the world, followed by the rise of the mechanistic worldview, the gradual formation of modern consciousness made it all but impossible to see the world as organically interrelated, as medieval holism had held. In countries where the synthesis of the modern worldview first occurred and became entrenched before spreading—Britain, France, northern Germany, and the United States—the 'objective', 'concrete', 'rational' view of Mary, expressed first by the Reformation Fathers and later by the progressive theologians at and since Vatican II, was more compelling than it was in the rest of the Catholic world. There the acceptance of the mechanistic worldview of modernity and philosophical materialism is tempered by the older, non-modern recognition that everything alive is somehow dynamically interrelated, vital, and unpredictably engaging. Even in the most modern of societies, many Catholic individuals have cultivated, through familial or cultural influences, a sensibility that recognizes both the modern and the very ancient, deeply relational perceptions of existence. For all those Catholics, there is a religious logic in holding that Mary began life as an ordinary human but grew, through the course of her sacred labours of the Incarnation and Redemption, to cosmological proportions.

After all, each of us has a small self within our sac of skin and also a cosmological self because our physical being is composed of, functions by, and participates in fields of dynamic interrelatedness that extend throughout the whole of Creation. Such are the discover-

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ies in thousands of experiments in human physiology during the first years of the twenty-first century, which are finally displacing the biomechanistic model (Spretnak 2011). These recent findings about the human organism are in agreement with previous discoveries of dynamic interrelatedness in quantum physics, chaos theory, and complexity studies in the twentieth century. Today the entire field of biology is in the process of shifting from 'parts-list' biology, reductionism, and other mechanistic assumptions to the systemic study of 'how humans and other life forms function through complex interrelationships and networks of relationship' (A New Biology for the 21st Century 2009).

The philosophically mechanistic underpinnings of science and culture are shifting in non-modern directions as it becomes more widely understood that there is an unbroken continuity of being, that the subtle levels of organic interrelatedness extend endlessly, and that our atoms are reabsorbed into the cosmological mix after our earthly life, still present, still everywhere. Is it really so unthinkable that the spiritual presence of Mary lives in myriad springs, grottos, and hilltops? That she is the bountiful female matrix of Christ *and* human transcendence? That she who knew human suffering radiates healing compassion and the unitive dimension of being? Or have we lost the subtlety of thought to understand religious symbols as part of a larger, vital gestalt? (p. 542)

Because the West turned away from pre-Greek holistic perceptions of physical reality in order to follow the classical and then the neoclassical, mechanistic perceptions of discontinuity, fragmentation, and the isolate self, we are now—even in the twenty-first century—in the early stages of discovering the profoundly interrelated nature of the world and revising every system of knowledge accordingly. During the long transition as culture absorbs the new discoveries, Catholic theology may shift from the anthropological focus of the past 60 years to the ecological and cosmological context. In recent years several Catholic theologians have done so, following in the footsteps of Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. and Thomas Berry, C.P. Most Catholic theologians engaging with scientific cosmology today, usually progressives, see no relevance to Mary or to cultural cosmology, but others take a broader view. The theologian Sarah Jane Boss has proposed in *Mary* (2003) that the Blessed Virgin Mary shares an identity with the elemental matrix—the vibratory quantum fields of interrelatedness—of which the world is created. Since the world comes from, goes to, and is infused with the presence of God, the cosmos is, like Mary, Godbearing. The Incarnation recapitulates the Creation, which reflects the Divine. In this light, Boss suggests subtle, multivalent interpretations of the meaning of Marian symbols, especially the Throne of Wisdom statues from medieval France (Boss 2003: x, 4, 109). Another exploration of Mary's relationship with the Creation, *Mary and Ecological Spirituality*, was presented at the Marian Library at the University of Dayton by Johann Roten, S.M. in 2017. Citing *Laudato Si'*, he noted that ecology is the study of interrelatedness, which is also the essence of the Virgin Mary, and he suggested thirteen themes that might well be explored in Marian ecospirituality (Roten 2017).

Several traditional expressions of Mary as the maternal matrix are brought to mind by various other scientific discoveries. Non-local causality (events at the quantum level are coordinated in other, distant regions) is relevant to the sense that one can commune

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across space and time with Mary and with Christ, that there is a unitive dimension. Molecular kinship (everything in the universe is composed of elementary particles that have their origin in the birth of the cosmos) reminds us of the image of the multitudes sheltered under Mary's open cloak. All are kin. All are held. Then, too, the Blessed Mother is felt to be everywhere at once—in roadside shrines, simple chapels, and grand cathedrals. As Thomas Berry put it (private correspondence), *Mary is a cosmology*, a grand context for our religious expressions of the human and the Divine.

One of the most thoughtful books on the aftermath of the collision between Mary and mid-century modernity is an anthology edited by John C. Cavadini and Danielle M. Peters, *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, which presents an appreciation of the constructive insights in the writings of prominent modernizing theologians who influenced Vatican II as well as noting that leading figures among them (Yves Congar and (p. 543) Karl Rahner) later bemoaned the disappearance of Mary in modernized Catholicism. Cavadini writes in the introduction:

There are so many, as it were, beautifully colored threads of reflection on Mary that have been simply left behind. Some of them were woven into Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, the council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Some of them were not. All of them were dropped, seemingly, after the Council. Perhaps at a distance of nearly sixty years we can look at the various theologies without feeling quite so keenly the controversies out of which they arose and to which they contributed. ... It may allow us to refuse some of the dichotomies that seemed so urgent in some of those decades, for example, between the so-called Marian maximalism and the so-called minimalism. ... From the perspective of the present dearth, even the 'minimalism' of the 1950s can seem maximalist!

(Cavadini and Peters 2017: 2)

Revisiting and weaving together divergent perspectives is an admirable goal, but we cannot fully grasp what occurred in the Marian decisions at Vatican II without including a contextual understanding of the dynamics of modernity. The reformers sought not merely to reduce extreme or 'isolated' expressions of Marian devotion but to 'purify' it by disallowing all perceptions of the Virgin Mary that maintain premodern recognition of diffuse presence and profound interrelatedness—such that all that would be left is what the modern mindset can respect: the literal, the 'objective', the concrete, and the shrinking of the sacred down to human size.

Neither the pre-Vatican II 'confident Church', which brooked no criticism, nor the post-war sense of modernity as salvific exist today. Few people still maintain uncritical enthusiasm for the modern, technocratic state and the muscular enforcement of mechanistic thinking over human life and the more-than-human world. Certainly the spiritual presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary is an ill fit with modernity, but she is magnificently premodern, non-modern, and postmodern with regard to our understanding of physical reali-

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ty through twenty-first-century science and the recovery of multivalent, deeply relational thought.

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