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Title: **The Marian Theology of Henri de Lubac**

Abstract:

The Mariology of de Lubac is significantly different from that of some of his contemporaries and recent predecessors, including some whom he holds in high regard; and de Lubac's distinctiveness is surely to be commended. For where certain authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were quick to present the Blessed Virgin in terms that rendered her quintessentially 'feminine', de Lubac always holds fast to the central teaching that Mary is the Virgin Mother and type of the Church, and shows how the image of Mary as 'spouse' is built upon this foundation. He does not elaborate Scriptural types of the bride, or spouse, into wider speculations about masculinity and femininity, but remains grounded in the theological tradition of the early and medieval periods. This characteristic of de Lubac's Mariology tends to go unnoticed, perhaps because de Lubac writes with politeness, not drawing attention to evident difficulties in the Mariology of some of his colleagues. Rather, he refers to their work only to describe it or, where appropriate, to speak of it with approval. Nevertheless, the difference between de Lubac and these others should be noted, because it can instruct the reader in theological method.

It should also be noted that de Lubac's Mariology is not entirely without precedent in the modern period. To some extent, he followed in the steps of the nineteenth-century 'Roman School', as well as those of John Henry Newman, who had adopted a historical, inductive method in their theology in general and their Mariology in particular.

The Marian Theology of Henri de Lubac

1. Introduction

The Marian Theology of Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) is spread across a number of his works. Texts about Mary appear, *inter alia*, in *Catholicisme* and in *Exégèse Médiévale*.[1] He contributed an essay on Marie de l'Incarnation (1599-1672), foundress of the Ursulines in Canada, to Volume 3 of *Maria*, the influential collection of Marian essays that was edited by de Lubac's fellow Jesuit, Hubert du Manoir.[2] De Lubac also wrote a detailed exposition of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's prose poem *L'Éternel Féminin*, in which the Blessed Virgin is represented as occupying the position of greatest importance in the created order.[3] However, the works in which de Lubac's own Marian theology is most clearly articulated are ecclesiological: *The Motherhood of the Church*, *Paradoxe et Mystère de l'Église*, and, most importantly, the final chapter of *Méditation sur l'Église*.[4] We shall see that there is a coherence to de Lubac's Mariology, and that it is part and parcel of his ecclesiological understanding of the Catholic Tradition.

2. The Eve of Vatican II

In the period leading up to the Second Vatican Council, it was sometimes said that theologians were divided between 'Christotypical' and 'ecclesiotypical' ways of thinking about Mariology. Christotypical Mariology saw Mary as cast principally in the likeness of Christ. Thus, where Christ is the Redeemer, Mary was seen as Co-Redemptrix; where Christ is King, Mary was Queen; where Christ is the Mediator, Mary was Mediatrix; and so on. By contrast, ecclesiotypical Mariology presented Mary as cast principally in the likeness of the

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[1] Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme*, 3ème éd. Paris: Cerf, ND, 1943/4?; Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 4 vols., Paris: Aubier, 1959-64. Because I had restricted access to libraries, my use of French texts and English translations is not consistent.

[2] Henri de Lubac, SJ, 'Marie de l'Incarnation et la Sainte Vierge', in Hubert du Manoir, SJ (ed.), *Maria: Études sur la Sainte Vierge*, Tome III, Paris: Beauchesne, 1954, 181-204.

[3] Henri de Lubac, SJ, *L'Éternel Féminin: étude sur un texte du Père Teilhard de Chardin*, Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968.

[4] Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sergia Englund, OCD, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982; Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Paradoxe et mystère de l'Église*, Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967, especially Ch.3, 59-119; Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Méditation sur l'Église*, 2ème éd., rev., Paris: Aubier, 1953, 273-329.

Church. So, instead of being co-redeeming, she would be the first of the redeemed; instead of sharing in Christ's governance, she would typify the humility that fits a soul for God's kingdom; and instead of mediating God's graces, she would be their exemplary recipient. Writing at the time of the Vatican Council, René Laurentin pointed out that there were no Mariologists who actually subscribed to either of these perspectives *in toto*.[5] We can also note that Karl Rahner, in the 1950's, undercut the supposed dichotomy altogether, arguing that to co-operate fully with God and to be the Mother of God are precisely what it means to be perfectly redeemed.[6]

So where does de Lubac stand in all this? At first glance, he appears to come down clearly on the side of the ecclesiotypical Mariologists, since it is in the context of writing about the Church that he expounds most fully his understanding of Mary's importance in God's providence. Yet he understands both the Church and Mary as actively bound up in the work of Christ, and not as purely passive recipients of God's grace. Moreover, reading de Lubac sixty years after he was writing, there is something that stands out starkly in his ecclesial Mariology—which is also a Marian ecclesiology—namely, that, in keeping with the tradition of the Church from earliest times, ecclesio-Mariology is governed by the Scriptural image of Mary as virgin and mother, and by other Scriptural texts that the Church has habitually applied to both the Blessed Virgin and the Church. This is striking because, following the Second Vatican Council, ecclesiology often became focussed on the notion of the Church as People of God. This too is a Scriptural image, but one that has no obvious affinity with Mariology. In keeping with this shift in ecclesiology, a number of scholars tried to re-think Mariology, and pursued the theme of Mary as first or exemplary disciple (and thus as representative of the People of God)—a view which is now widely disseminated.[7] But in its contemporary

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[5] René Laurentin, *Mary's Place in the Church*, trans. I.G. Pidoux, London: Burns & Oates, 1965. The whole book is concerned with the 'two tendencies' within the Church, and with finding a way of restoring Mariology to a properly integrated position within Christian theology as a whole.

[6] Karl Rahner, 'Le principe fondamental de la thélogie mariale', *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 42:4, 1954, 481-522.

[7] E.g., Raymond Brown, et al. (eds.), *Mary in the New Testament*, Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1978) Joseph Paredes, *Mary and the Kingdom of God: A Synthesis of Mariology*, trans. J. Aries and J. Martinez. Slough: St Paul's, 2001; Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*, London: Bloomsbury, 2006.

formulation, this is not the historic Mariology of the Church, and it is not that of de Lubac, either.

3. Mary and the Church

The active character of both Mary and the Church is established at the beginning of Chapter 9 of *Méditation sur l'Église*, 'L'Église et la Vierge Marie'. Here, de Lubac quotes a passage from Barth's *Dogmatics*:

> In the doctrine and cult of the Virgin Mary there is disclosed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which enables us to understand all the others. The "Mother of God" of Roman Catholic Marian dogma is quite simply … the principle, type, and essence of the Church. … Thus, the Church in which Mary is venerated is bound to regard and understand itself as it has done in the Vatican decree [on papal infallibility]; this Church is necessarily the Church of the human being who, by virtue of grace, co-operates in grace.[8]

This passage is well known to Mariologists, partly for the reason that de Lubac himself gives for quoting from it. He says that Barth's analysis of the Catholic Church's understanding of the relationship between Mary, the Church, and the human person is correct; but whereas the Catholic Church (along with the Orthodox Churches) makes this Marian, ecclesial, and personal co-operation with God central to its anthropology, a Calvinist such as Barth will maintain that all talk of human co-operation fails to respect the absolute freedom of God's grace and humanity's radical dependence upon it.[9] De Lubac counters this objection by stating that the insistence that God's activity among the faithful is accomplished solely by God, '"without any human work"' (as Martin Luther has it), is 'only apparently more Christian'.[10] De Lubac argues that Reformed theologians have misunderstood the twofold

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[8] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 274. Quotation from Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2 (1938), 157, 160. English edition: *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I. 2, trans. G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956, 143, 146.

[9] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 275. Cf. Nicolas Cabasilas (1322-92): 'The Incarnation was not only the work of the Father, by His Power and by His Spirit, but it was also the work of the will and faith of the Virgin. Without the consent of the Immaculate, without the agreement of her faith, the plan was as unrealisable as it would have been without the intervention of the three divine Persons themselves.' Quoted in Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, Cambridge and London: James Clarke, 1957, 141.

[10] 'A quoi la théologie catholique répond qu'une telle exigence n'est qu'apparemment plus chrétienne.' De Lubac, *Méditation*, 273.

mystery whereby, on the one hand, there is 'the indispensable guarantee' that the Incarnation is in earnest, whilst, at the same time, the Incarnation bears witness to God's plan for associating the creature with the work of his or her own salvation.[11] Both the Church and the Christian soul are associates in God's saving work, and de Lubac holds that Mary is central to this creaturely co-operation: 'The ties from the Church to the Virgin Mary are not only direct and numerous: they are essential. They are woven from within.'[12] Indeed, the mystery of Mary and that of the Church may be said to be a single mystery.[13]

In a footnote, de Lubac quotes Clément Dillenschneider on the connection between the Church and the Virgin: 'It is not that there is a simple likeness of the one to the other. It is on account of an intimate, objective connection, that that which is proper to the Church, mother of the collective Christ, is realised first in the personal existence of Mary.'[14] The work from which this quotation is taken is concerned with Mary's work as Co-Redemptrix, and draws attention to the union of the co-redeeming work of Mary with that of the Church. Both Mary and the Church are active co-operators with Christ. This is signified by the fact that two sections of Chapter 9 of *Méditation* treat the topics of Mary as 'sanctifying' and 'sanctified', respectively.[15] It is Mary's motherhood which sanctifies, and it is Mary as the figure of the Communion of Saints—the one who carries the Church—that she is sanctified.[16] Thus, an ecclesiotypical Mariology does not necessarily signify that Mary is passive, or even purely receptive. Rather, a 'high' ecclesiology finds its counterpart in a 'high' Mariology, and *vice versa*.

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[11] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 274.

[12] 'De l'Église à la Vierge Marie, les liens ne sont pas seulement nombreux et étroits. Ils sont essentiels. Ils sont tissés de l'intérieur.' De Lubac, *Méditation*, 275.

[13] 'Ces deux mystères de notre foi sont plus que solidaires: on a pu dire qu'ils sont «un seul et unique mystère».' De Lubac, *Méditation*, 275, citing René Laurentin, *Marie, l'Église et le sacerdoce, I: Essai sur le développement d'une idée religieuse*, Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1952, 656, quoting Ruperto Maria de Manresa, OFM (1869-1939).

[14] '« Il n'y a pas simple similitude de l'une à l'autre. C'est en raison d'une connexion intime, objective, que ce qui convient à l'Église, mère du Christ collectif, s'est réalisé d'abord dans l'existence personnelle de Marie. »' Clément Dillenschneider, C.SS., *Le Mystère de la Corédemption mariale: théories Nouvelles*, Paris: Vrin, 1951, 79, cited in De Lubac, *Méditation*, 275, n.8.

[15] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 279-293 and 293-305.

[16] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 293.

What, then, is the substance of this essential connection between Mary and the Church? Put simply, we might say that the office and work of the Church on earth is the living continuation of the office and work of the Mother of God, and that the Blessed Virgin remains present and active in the Church both in Heaven and on Earth. De Lubac's method is to draw on the Tradition—which includes authors of many kinds and of all historical periods—and to organise the various sources thematically, giving summaries, or extrapolating common elements, as he goes along. Thus, rather than providing an exposition of the philosophical assumptions that underlie the authors' various arguments and assertions, he enables the reader to appropriate the Tradition for him- or herself. For example, in both Mariology and ecclesiology, the Tradition makes considerable use of a general principle of correspondences—of typology, of juxtaposing images, and of the notion that, at the level of the spiritual or of sacred mystery, things can participate in one another, or share an identity. De Lubac quotes Isaac of Stella (1100-69), who writes of Mary and the Church: 'each gives a posterity to God the Father: Mary, without sin, furnishes the body with its head; the Church, in remitting all sins, gives to this Head its body. Each is thus mother of Christ; but neither gives birth entirely without the other.'[17] This understanding of Mary and the Church draws immediately upon St Paul's image of the Church as the body of Christ and Christ as its Head. The logic of Isaac's thought is surely that, because the Word of God took flesh and was born from Mary, so it is that men and women of flesh can be re-born from the Church: that the re-birth of the children of Adam through baptism makes them members of the body of Christ, and that this is possible because Mary gave birth to the second Adam, Christ, who is the Head.

Another variant on this theme is that of the Christian as *alter Christus*. De Lubac quotes the words of the English abbot and bishop, Gilbert Foliot (1110-87), that Christ is 'son of the Church', and explains: 'For now, still, and each day, *usque hodie*, the Church gives to the world Him to whom Mary once gave birth. Each time a man becomes a Christian, it is

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[17] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 284. 'Marie et l'Église … « donnent l'une et l'autre au Dieu Père une postérité: Marie, sans aucun péché, fournit au corps sa tête; l'Église, dan la rémission de tous les péchés, donne à cette Tête son corps. L'une et l'autre est donc mère du Christ: mais aucune des deux ne l'enfante tout entier sans l'autre ».'
Quotation from Isaac of Stella, *Sermo* 61 (*PL* 194.1683).

Christ who is born afresh, and a new virginal childbirth procures for Christ a new infancy.'[18] Thus, the childbearing of the Church repeats and perpetuates the childbearing of Mary.

If we extend de Lubac's method of working to include visual, as well as textual, examples from the Tradition, then we might consider the wall-painting of the Virgin and Child above the altar of the parish church at Great Canfield, in Essex [Fig.1]. Painted at the very beginning of the thirteenth century, it shows the Blessed Virgin seated on a throne that looks like a font. It seems as if the viewer is supposed to understand that, just as Mary's child, the Son of God, was born from her womb to be united to us, so we in turn are re-born from the womb of the Church in order to be united to Him.

This correspondence between Mary and the Church, achieving, as it does, a point almost of union, was taken up by authors closer to de Lubac's own day. He refers to the work of Matthias Scheeben (1835-88):[19]

> In 1865, [Scheeben] outlined a parallel between the functions of Mary and the priesthood of the Church. In 1870, he drew attention to 'a rich and striking analogy between the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, [which signifies the] absolute purity of the *Sedes Sapientiae*, and the dogma of the infallibility of the Holy See, [which signifies the] absolute purity of the *Cathedra Sapientiae*.' In his view, the relationship between the two motherhoods is so intimate and so universal that the language of correspondence or analogy does not seem sufficient to account for it. Rather, he says, there is a 'perichoresis'. He could have taken up

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[18] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 285. '[C]ar maintenant encore, et chaque jour, *usque hodie*, l'Église met au monde Celui que Marie jadis enfanta; chaque fois qu'un homme devient chrétien c'est de nouveau le Christ qui naît, et un nouvel enfantement virginal procure au Christ une nouvelle enfance.' The elements of this summary are taken from Gilbert Foliot's Commentary on the Song of Songs (*PL* 202.129A), Bede's Commentary on the Book of the Apocalypse (*PL* 93.165-6), the Commentary on the Apocalypse by Berengaud (840-92) (*PL* 17.877A), and Paschasius Radbert's Commentary on Matthew (*PL* 120.104C).

[19] De Lubac held Scheeben in high regard, describing him as 'more than a teacher: a true theologian. … [H]e extracts the deep meaning of doctrine, beyond the scholarly schemata' ('plus qu'un professeur: un vrai théologien … il dégage le sens profond de la doctrine, au delà des schèmes scolaires', *Méditation*, 285, n.57). However, whilst generally approving of Scheeben's—sad to say, unfinished—treatment of Mary and the Church, de Lubac does also refer to its containing 'quelques étroitesses ou précisions contestables' (*Méditation*, 284).

the highly expressive formula of Serlon of Savigny: *Maria in Ecclesia, et Ecclesia in Maria figuratur*.[20]

De Lubac's observations of Scheeben's work include a number of noteworthy points. First, there is the comment on the parallel between Mary and the Church's priestly office. The wall-painting from Great Canfield [Fig.1] depicts Christ as God incarnate and is situated above the altar, so that, when the priest elevates the host and chalice, they will appear immediately in front of it, that is, in front of a representation of the Incarnation. A visual correspondence is made between Mary's original giving of Christ to the world, and the Church's sacramental continuation of that work. We can also note that the Canfield Virgin is nursing her son, and art historians have suggested that the foundation of this motif in Christian iconography is to be found in the idea that the Church nurses her children with the elements of the Eucharist, so that Mary's nursing of Christ is a type of the Church's nourishment of the Christian.

The correspondence between Mary's motherhood and the Church's sacramental realisation of Christ's presence is shown even more vividly in an early fifteenth-century manuscript illumination from Worcester Cathedral Library [Fig.2]. Here, we see a priest in a chasuble of Marian blue, elevating the chalice before a statue of the Virgin and Child. The illumination appears in a book of communicant prayers (that is, prayers for lay people at Mass), and is placed beneath the words of consecration of the chalice. So we are implicitly invited to see the Church's realisation of the presence of Christ as a continuation of, or a participation in, his incarnation from his mother Mary.

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[20] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 284-5. 'En 1865, il esquissait un parallèle entre les fonctions de Marie et le sacerdoce de l'Église. En 1870, il notait « une analogie riche et frappante entre le dogme de l'Immaculée Conception, pureté absolue de la *Sedes Sapientiae*, et le dogme de l'infaillibilité du Saint-Siège, pureté absolue de la *Cathedra Sapientiae* ». Il voit entre les deux maternités une relation si intime et si universelle, que les mots de correspondance ou d'analogie ne lui paraissent pas suffire à en rendre compte. C'est plutôt, dit-il, une «périchorèse». Il aurait pu reprendre la formule si expressive de Serlon de Savigny: *Maria in Ecclesia, et Ecclesia in Maria figuratur.*' The quotation from the monastic founder, Blessed Serlon of Savigny (d.1158), is taken from a sermon on the Nativity of the Virgin. De Lubac cites an edition by Tissier, but I have been unable to find any bibliographical record of it. I assume the editor is Bernard Tissier, the seventeenth-century Cistercian prior and textual scholar.

The correspondence between Mary and the Church's priestly office may also be implied in some twelfth-century statues of Mary as Seat of Wisdom. In a number of images from the Auvergne region, she is wearing the pallium—a garment associated with the pope and his universal authority [Fig.3]. It is hard to know exactly why the Blessed Virgin is represented in this way, but a good guess would be that she embodies the Church, signified here by a hierarchical vestment.

A second noteworthy point in de Lubac's account of Scheeben is the correspondence that is drawn between the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception (formally defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854) and the doctrine of papal infallibility (defined at the First Vatican Council, at which the promulgation of 1854 was cited as an instance in which the Pope's infallible authority had already been exercised). It is specifically as the voice of the universal Church that the Pope speaks infallibly, and it is thus that papal infallibility and Mary's sinlessness form a correspondence between the Virgin and the Church. Karl Barth, in the section already quoted from the *Church Dogmatics,* similarly noted the correspondence between the two doctrines, but as a further example of the Catholic Church's faulty self-understanding and its equally faulty Mariology. For Scheeben and de Lubac, by contrast, it points to truths about Mary, the Church, and the deep union that exists between them.

The union of Mary and the Church is described as a *perichoresis*, by analogy with the relationship amongst the Persons of the Blessed Trinity. With regard to the Church and Mary, each exists and acts in the other. When we speak of either one, we simultaneously imply the other. And this perichoresis is the deep meaning of the typological relationship between Mary and the Church: it is the meaning of Serlon of Savigny's statement that each is figured in the other. De Lubac draws attention to the many Old Testament types which the Church and Mary share in common. Each may be seen as the New Eve, Mother of All the Living.[21] Each is a new Paradise, the Tree of Life, the Ark of the Covenant, Jacob's Ladder, and the Gate of Heaven.[22] The Woman of the Apocalypse, likewise, is both the Church and the Virgin.[23] One may be inclined to read this meeting of Mary and the Church in their types, as poetic

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[21] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 275.

[22] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 276.

[23] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 277.

synthesis or, in some cases, as prophetic fulfilment. But de Lubac is clear that the reason why the same types are employed for each figure is that they truly share an identity.

At each moment of her existence, Mary speaks and acts in the name of the Church—*figuram in se sanctae Ecclesiae demonstrat*—not in virtue of a sort of superimposed decision, nor, indeed, as the effect of an explicit decision on her part, but because she already, so to speak, carries and contains it entirely whole in her person. She is, says Jean-Jacques Olier, 'the whole of the Church'. She is 'the Church, kingdom and priesthood, brought together in one single person'.[24]

4. Mary and the Soul

One motif that is strong in de Lubac's ecclesiology is the understanding that the character of the Church is present in each of its members, and this applies in the case of the motherhood of the Church and Mary.[25] He draws attention to the tradition from the earliest centuries which holds that Christ must be born in the soul of each believer, and this theme is the subject of the culminating section of *Exégèse médiévale*.[26] From the beginning, this birthgiving and motherhood was often attributed with an expressly Marian character. For example, Origen writes: 'Every incorrupt soul, having conceived by the Holy Spirit to engender the will of the Father, is the mother of Christ' (*Fragment of Commentary on Matthew*, 281). At the same time, de Lubac writes, 'With Hippolytus, and even more with Origen, arises the great theme in Christian thought, resumed indefinitely ever since, of the structural analogy between the Church and the Christian soul.'[27] This understanding of the birth of Christ in the soul became associated with Christmas:

> The Western Middle Ages saw, in the three Masses of Christmas, a symbol of the three births of the Word: the first being the eternal birth in the bosom of the Father; the second, his

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[24] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 278. The Latin quotation is taken from several fourth-century authors, and the final quotation is from Laurentin, *Marie, l'Église et le sacerdoce*, 111, describing the teaching of Pseudo-Bernard (a very prolific author!).

[25] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 310 and 312, citing St Peter Damian. This is also the subject of the final section of *Catholicisme*.

[26] De Lubac, *Exégèse* II.2 [i.e. vol. 4], 505-13.

[27] De Lubac, *Motherhood*, 79.

historical birth from the womb of the Virgin as a result of his Incarnation; and the third, fruit of the second, his spiritual birth in the womb of the Christian soul.[28] The birth in the soul occurs because the Christian belongs to the Church, and the fact that the spiritual birth is rooted in the historical birth of Christ from Mary ensures that it occurs within the orthodox practice of the Catholic Tradition.[29]

The correspondence between Mary, the Church, and the soul is a deep one, and not capable of simple rationalization of a logical kind.[30] De Lubac deals at some length with the subject of the correspondence between the three, and draws attention to the fact that Mary is not only the type of the Church and the Christian soul, but also the Church's pre-eminent member. Moreover, drawing on St Ambrose, de Lubac says, 'to bear the fruit of faith, Mary's soul must be in each one of us, since she magnifies the Lord; in each of us the spirit of Mary, who exults in God.'[31] He paraphrases St Bonaventure's treatment of the symbol of the Ark (a type of Mary), from a sermon for the Feast of Our Lady's Birthday:

> The three figurative senses of Scripture—allegory, which refers to the Church; tropology, which concerns the soul; and anagogy, which transports us to the Heavens—converge in a summit which surpasses them all in order to signify this unique Wonder.[32]

The threefold figure of Church-Mary-soul is not only mother, but also spouse. The motif of the Church as bride, or spouse, of Christ is found in the New Testament, and came to be applied to Mary at a later time. This development was especially associated with the interpretation of the Song of Songs, and de Lubac considers the exegesis of the Song at

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[28] De Lubac, *Motherhood*, 80.

[29] Cf. De Lubac, *Motherhood*, 80-1, n.11.

[30] When considering the dangers of 'exuberance of imagination' in allegorical interpretations of Scripture, de Lubac warns against going, as it were, too far the other way: 'Toutefois, si nous voulons rendre justice à nos vieux auteurs et ne pas nous priver nous-mêmes d'un authentique trésor, veillons à n'être point victimes, dans nos jugements, de vues trop analytiques' (*Méditation*, 313).

[31] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 301-5; reference to Ambrose at 304 (*In Lucam*, II, 26 [*PL* 15.1561D]). ''[P]our porter le fruit do la foi, faut-il qu'en chacun soit l'âme de Marie, qui magnifie le Seigneur; en chacun l'esprit de Marie, qui exulte en Dieu.'

[32] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 304-5 (Bonaventure, *De Nativitate BVM*, *Sermo* 5 [Quaracchi, t.IX, 715]). 'Les trois sens figurés de l'Écriture: l'allégorie, qui se rapporte à l'Église, la tropologie, qui concerne l'âme, et l'anagogie, qui nous transporte aux cieux, convergent en un sommet qui les dépasse tous pour désigner cette merveille unique.'

length.[33] Paradoxically, it is Mary's status as spouse that shows the significance of her virginity, namely, that she is faithful to Christ, her bridegroom. The virginal Church has not had dalliance with other gods, and has been faithful to the Gospel.[34]

5. The Cosmic Mary

De Lubac's understanding of the Church is that it is universal. Catholicism is universal in the sense that its teachings are truths for all humanity—the fullest articulation of truths that are also found, but less perfectly, in the traditions of other religions. Although his monograph, *Catholicisme*, was concerned with the 'social' aspects of dogma, he made clear at the beginning that a fuller treatment of his subject would include a consideration not only of humanity, but also of the rest of the created order, both physical and spiritual.[35] Perhaps it was this universal—that is, cosmic—aspect of Catholicism that led him to write a detailed study of *L'Éternel Féminin*, a prose-poem by his fellow Jesuit, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. This work is concerned with the universal and cosmic character of 'the feminine', which includes virginity (including purity and chastity more generally), and of love. De Lubac's study sheds light on it by taking account not only of the poem, but of the diaries that Teilhard kept whilst he was preparing it. In his diary, Teilhard wrote that the subject of the meditation was to be 'the Feminine, the Absolute Feminine, the universal Feminine, the absolute feminine element, the transcendental Feminine, and the eternal Feminine.'[36] The perfection of the Feminine, he said, is realised in a personal being, the Virgin Mary.[37]

Teilhard understands that the universe is formed through Love, which draws it ever onwards towards its destiny in Christ. He sees the Feminine as that which inspires this Love. It attracts and unifies, and leads to God: 'in its supreme realisation, it is none other than

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[33] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 306-15.

[34] De Lubac's treatment of Mary as spouse is discussed in Troy A. Stefano, 'Catholica Mater: The Marian Insights of Henri de Lubac,' in John C. Cavadini and John M. Peters (eds.), *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017) 179-203.

[35] De Lubac, *Catholicisme*, xi.

[36] De Lubac, *L'éternel feminin*, 23.

[37] De Lubac, *L'éternel feminin*, 24.

"Christ appearing through and in the Virgin"'.[38] For a long time, according to Teilhard, love was 'confounded with the reproductive function'. With the coming of humanity, it became possible to define as 'the same attraction exercised on each conscious element by the Centre in the formation of the Universe'. So it is that Woman stands before Man 'as the attractiveness and the symbol of the World'. 'Towards Man, through Woman, it is in reality the Universe which moves forward.' And Teilhard adds: 'The only point at issue is that they should recognise one another.'[39]

So the love that exists between man and woman should overflow into love of the Universe. This in turn has Christ as its focus and destiny, with the cosmic Mary performing a mediating role: 'If the Feminine is "the cosmic element of attraction," it "flourishes (is transformed) in the Virgin": "Christ appears to us through you, Mary."'[40]

Central to the attractiveness of the Feminine is the ideal of Virginity, and it is Love which leads to this. Love of God gives rise both to Virginity and, in marriage, to the chastity of a true love which includes God, and which overflows to the world around the couple.[41] The primary example of Virginity is, of course, the Blessed Virgin, who remained a virgin whilst also being a mother. For de Lubac, as we have seen, this motif is one that is shared with the Church. For Teilhard, Virginity has a cosmic nature, since it is what frees sexual love, which is directed to its own particular object, to become a love that is truly universal, and is thus directed towards the end for which all things were created.[42] Thus, Virginity, because of its object, has a character that is in some way beyond the finite. De Lubac observes that Teilhard

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[38] De Lubac, *L'éternel feminin*, 30. '[D]an sa réalisation suprême il n'est autre que «le Christ transparaissant dans la Vierge.»'

[39] De Lubac, *L'éternel feminin*, 64. 'L'Amour était «*confondu*» avec las fonction de reproduction. A partir de l'Homme, on pourra le définir comme «l'attraction même exercée sur chaque élément conscient par le Centre en formation de l'Univers». Voici donc que la Femme se tient devant l'Homme «comme l'attrait et le symbole du Monde». «Vers l'Homme, à travers la Femme, c'est en réalité l'Univers qui s'avance.» Et Teilhard d'ajouter: «Toute la question est qu'ils se reconnaissent.»'

[40] De Lubac, *L'éternel féminin*, 25. 'Si le Féminin est «l'élément attractif cosmique», il «fleurit (se transforme) dans la Vierge»: «Le Christ nous apparaît à travers vous, Marie.»'

[41] De Lubac, *L'éternel feminin*, 66-73.

[42] De Lubac, *L'éternel feminin*, 9-10 and elsewhere.

cites Nicholas of Cusa 'on a par with Plato', and it may be that Teilhard's notion of Virginity was inspired by Nicholas's writing about the perpetual virginity of Mary:[43]

> Had she not remained a virgin after birth, she would, beforehand, have furnished to this most excellent birth a center of maternal fertility not in her supreme perfection of brightness but in a divided and diminished way, not proper to so unique and supreme a son. Therefore, if this most holy virgin offered her whole self to God, for whom she fully participated the complete nature of her fertility through the work of the Holy Spirit, then before, during and after the birth virginity remained in her, immaculate and uncorrupted, beyond all natural ordinary procreation.[44]

Mary's virginity has a trans-finite, and therefore trans-temporal, character because its object is the eternal Word of God. Teilhard sees Christian virginity in general as having such an object, and as participating in the project of cosmic advancement towards its divinely given fulfillment. If we expand this reading in accordance with de Lubac's own ecclesial Mariology, then we have to see this Virginity, which expresses and accomplishes that love which founds and forms the Universe, as something which is as proper to the Church as it is to the Blessed Virgin, with whom the Church shares an identity.

Conclusion

Having seen that de Lubac treats Teilhard's *Eternal Feminine* with great care and appreciation, we should also note that the Mariology of de Lubac is significantly different from that of some of his contemporaries and recent predecessors, including some whom he holds in high regard; and de Lubac's distinctiveness is surely to be commended. For where certain authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were quick to present the Blessed Virgin in terms that rendered her quintessentially 'feminine', de Lubac always holds fast to the central teaching that Mary is the Virgin Mother and type of the Church, and shows how the image of Mary as 'spouse' is built upon this foundation. He does not elaborate Scriptural types of the bride, or spouse, into wider speculations about masculinity and femininity, but

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[43] De Lubac, *L'éternel féminin*, 51.

[44] Nicholas of Cusa, 'On Learned Ignorance', III, 5, 2, in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond, Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1997, 182.

remains grounded in the theological tradition of the early and medieval periods. This characteristic of de Lubac's Mariology tends to go unnoticed, perhaps because de Lubac writes with politeness, not drawing attention to evident difficulties in the Mariology of some of his colleagues.[45] Rather, he refers to their work only to describe it or, where appropriate, to speak of it with approval. Nevertheless, the difference between de Lubac and these others should be noted, because it can instruct the reader in theological method.

It should also be noted that de Lubac's Mariology is not entirely without precedent in the modern period. To some extent, he followed in the steps of the nineteenth-century 'Roman School', as well as those of John Henry Newman, who had adopted a historical, inductive method in their theology in general and their Mariology in particular.[46]

Following Vatican II, de Lubac did take account of the idea of the Church as 'People of God'—an understanding that fits well with his emphasis on the Church as an essentially social body.[47] However, this biblical image has not always been explicitly drawn out in Church writings through the ages, and de Lubac's thinking about Mary and the Church serves to bring the theologian back to the heart of the continuing Tradition, which is rooted in, but not limited to, the text of Scripture. In this way, newer developments, such as a new focus on a given biblical motif, will always be inspired by, and incorporated within, practice that is authentically Catholic. This continuation of the Tradition is something that Mariologists seem to have difficulty in doing, be they 'conservatives', such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, or 'liberals', such as Elizabeth Johnson. De Lubac's Mariological insight may perhaps be summed up in words from *Méditation*: 'The Christian mystery is one. In Mary, in the Church, in each soul, it is the same.'[48] If we take seriously what it means to say that the one mystery of Christ is in the Church over time and space, then perhaps we shall come to an understanding of the true place of the Mother of God in God's work of creation and salvation.

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[45] A striking example of this would be in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose Mariology and ecclesiology are built largely upon romantic notions of masculinity and femininity, with rather little reference to the patristic sources that were apparently his starting point.

[46] Kasper, Walter. *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule*, Freiburg: Herder, 1962. De Lubac cites the magisterial work of Carlo Passaglia, a principal representative of the Roman School, on the subject of the Immaculate Conception. De Lubac, *Méditation*, 277, n.18.

[47] De Lubac, *Paradoxe et Mystère*, 75-88.

[48] De Lubac, *Méditation*, 321.

Figure 1. *Virgin and Child*, *c.*1200. St Mary's Church, Great Canfield, Essex.
Drawing by E.W. Tristram (copyright Victoria and Albert Museum).

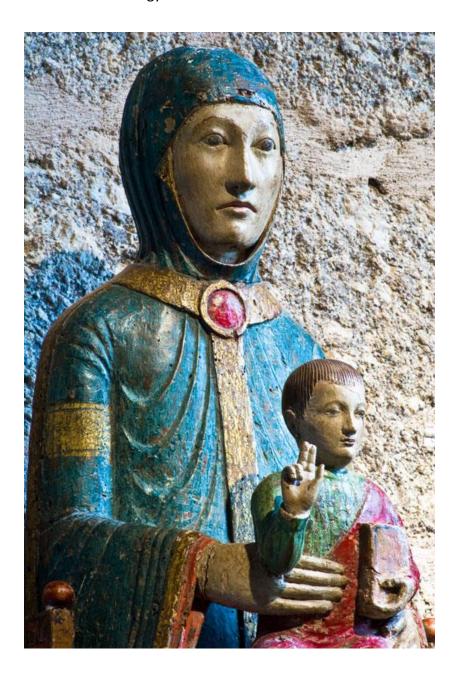**Figure 2.** *Book of Communicant Prayers* (1406), Worcester Cathedral Library.

**Figure 3. Notre-Dame d'Estours, Monistrol d'Allier, 12th cent?
Photo: Dennis Aubrey.**