# Mother Church

## CAN RECEPTIVITY BE SQUARED WITH RESISTANCE?

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## I. Introduction

As Henri de Lubac and others have documented, the Church Fathers and medieval theologians celebrated the Church as our mother.[1] As de Lubac says with Galatians 4 in view—and in preparation for quoting Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, Basil,

1. See Henri de Lubac, SJ, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sergia Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982). See also such studies as Karl Delahaye, *Ecclesia Mater. Chez les pères des trois premiers siècles. Pour un renouvellement de la pastorale d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Cerf, 1964); J.C. Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia: An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church as Mother in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1943); Deyanira Flores, "Virgin Mother of Christ: Mary, the Church, the Faithful Soul—Patristic and Medieval Testimonies on This Inseparable Trio," *Marian Studies* 57 (2006): 97–172; and, focusing on de Lubac's approach, Denis Dupont-Fauville, *L'Église mère chez Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2009). By comparison, the image of the Church as mother has had a mixed—at best—reception in the decades following the Second Vatican Council. On the one hand, Gilberte Baril, OP, argues that the "maternal commitment of the ecclesial bride and of her members cannot be understood in any other way except in terms of participation in [the] *kenosis* of love of the Son, the only true salvific 'birth' of the new world" (*The Feminine Face of the People of God: Biblical Symbols of the Church as Bride and Mother* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990], 203). For Baril, the image of the Church as mother is a liberative image, evoking radical solidarity with the poor and with those who are suffering. On the other hand, Cristina Lledo Gomez holds that the image of Mother Church reflects what she calls "the 'Good Mother' myth," which "continues to affect women all over the world in insidious but also overtly dangerous ways" (*The Church as Woman and Mother: Historical and Theological Foundations* [New York: Paulist, 2018], xvii–xviii). In Gomez's view, appreciation for "Mother Church" tends to idealize motherhood and to reify the notion of "two genders" (*Church as Woman and Mother*, 181). Gomez perceives Pope Francis as trying to rectify this situation but as still falling into gendered stereotypes at times. See also Natalie K. Watson, *Introducing*

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Augustine, and others on this theme—"She [the Church] summons all men so that as their mother she may bring them forth to divine life and eternal light."[2] De Lubac wrote extensively on Mother Church while in the midst of a wrenching conflict with the Magisterium of the Church, a conflict that caused him to be removed from his professorship in Lyon and from his editorial duties for *Recherches de science religieuse*. This conflict must have been particularly difficult for him given the Jesuit emphasis upon obedience, in accordance with Ignatius's well-known prayer, "Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me: I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will." Ignatius understood obedience to the pope to be especially important for Catholics and for Jesuits. In the midst of his ecclesiastical sanction, de Lubac showed that he loved the Church as his spiritual mother, a mother who gives us the nourishing gifts of divinely revealed truth and to whom obedience is owed.

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*Feminist Ecclesiology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1996). For Watson (and a number of others),

> the use of Mary, after all a real childbearing woman, as the supreme personification of the church, is also a reminder of the exclusion of women and their suffering from traditional ecclesiological reflections. . . . Any personification of the church, be it as Mary or as the new Eve, remains ultimately problematic as it exalts one person to be the supreme ideal of anything any member of the church is meant to be and yet, due to their sexual identity and nature cannot achieve. Personification perpetuates oppressive hierarchical gender patterns and deters attention from the reality and diversity of the lives of those who are church. Being church expresses a form of corporate identity which entails diversity among its members. It not only exalts the absence and denial of female sexuality, but also points to the supposed superiority of maternity and motherhood which is the experience of some women but by no means of all. Motherhood is in itself an ambiguous experience, as is the experience of being mothered. (*Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, 40–41)

2. Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 65.

Indeed, de Lubac was so concerned with not being perceived as a rebel that he has been criticized for this aspect of his ecclesiology. In *The Suspended Middle*, while praising de Lubac (along with Sergius Bulgakov) as one of the two great theologians of the twentieth century, John Milbank argues that de Lubac fell into the trap of conceiving of the "Marian" and "Female" (and "Lay") Church in strictly responsive terms.[3] In Milbank's view, this meant that de Lubac cast the Petrine office—the Magisterium, representing the clergy and grace—strictly in terms of "active authority" that must be obeyed.[4] Milbank refers to de Lubac's "perhaps insufficient critique of modern centralized papal control," and he underscores that "that which is Marian is not simply receptive, but 'actively receptive.'"[5] Although I will make clear that de Lubac understood *active* receptivity and had a nuanced view of the Magisterium, Milbank's critique nevertheless rightly shines light on de Lubac's commitment to obeying Mother Church.

In the years following the Second Vatican Council, de Lubac's emphasis on Mother Church came to seem self-serving to some observers since de Lubac was now in the inner circle of magisterial authority. Whereas in 1950, de Lubac had been under the condemnatory gaze of the Magisterium, after the Council, he joined with the Magisterium to shine condemnatory light upon others. His good friend Joseph Ratzinger, as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, assisted in the 1990 promulgation of the Instruction *Donum Veritatis*, "On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian." This Instruction teaches that the role of the Magisterium is to "protect God's People from the danger of deviations and confusion, guaranteeing them the objective possibility of professing the authentic faith free from error, at all times and in diverse

3. John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Renewed Split in Modern Catholic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 111.

4. Milbank, 111.

5. Milbank, 109, 112.

situations."[6] The Instruction was written against theologians then known as "dissenters," due to their vocal and public dissent from *Humanae Vitae* and indeed from almost every initiative of Pope John Paul II's pontificate, including (later in the 1990s) the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. In the decades following the Council, these "dissenting" theologians held a dominant position in most Catholic universities and colleges around the world and in many seminaries as well. They were associated with the journal *Concilium*, from which de Lubac and Ratzinger had broken off to form *Communio*. The dissenting theologians' guiding lights included Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Bernard Häring, and Jon Sobrino, among others.[7]

6. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Veritatis* §14, May 24, 1990, vatican.va.

7. For a thoroughgoing critique of Rahner's theology, see Christopher J. Malloy, "Rahner: The Withering of Faith," in *The Faith Once and for All Delivered: Doctrinal Authority in Catholic Theology*, ed. Kevin L. Flannery, SJ (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023), 31–68. The same volume contains a helpful critique of Walter Kasper's deeply problematic theology: see Thomas Heinrich Stark, "The Historicity of Truth: On the Premises and Foundations of Walter Kasper's Theology," in *Faith Once and for All Delivered*, 69–100. Malloy and Stark show—in Stark's case by quoting Kasper at length—that dogma collapses in Rahner's and Kasper's theological systems. See also Karl Rahner, SJ, "Yesterday's History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18: *God and Revelation*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 3–34; and the trenchant response by Hans Urs von Balthasar in his *New Elucidations*, trans. Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 74–87. For praise of Schillebeeckx's critique of dogma, see Daniel Speed Thompson, *The Language of Dissent: Edward Schillebeeckx on the Crisis of Authority in the Catholic Church* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003). Thompson explains that for the postconciliar Schillebeeckx, who rejects "a developmental model of doctrine" in favor of "*a hermeneutical, critical, and practical translation of Christian experience from one historical era to the next*," it is the case that "any purely theoretical understanding of the faith, whether simply conceptual or even hermeneutically nuanced, is impossible within the epistemological conditions of human historicity. Because the criterion for orthodoxy does not rest in such a theoretical construction, or even with the idea that there is one essence of faith which is simply clothed in different conceptual forms, Schillebeeckx argues that continuity in

*Donum Veritatis* avers that even non-infallible "magisterial decisions in matters of discipline . . . are not without divine assistance and call for the adherence of the faithful."[8] All that the Magisterium teaches "in a definitive way" about faith and morals "must be firmly accepted and held," while non-definitive teaching requires "religious submission of will and intellect."[9] The dissenters agreed to none of the above as it pertained to the teachings that they opposed (i.e., teachings about the authority of the Magisterium, birth control, remarriage after divorce, homosexual acts, the reservation of the priesthood to men, and so on).

*Donum Veritatis* does allow for some forms of what I will call resistance-within-receptivity. The Instruction states, "the willingness to submit loyally to the teaching of the Magisterium on matters *per se* not irreformable must be the rule. It can happen, however, that a theologian may, according to the case, raise questions regarding the timeliness, the form, or even the contents of magisterial interventions."[10] In such cases, says the Instruction, theologians first need to assess the weight and degree of authoritativeness of the magisterial

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the understanding of faith comes from the act or intentionality of faith itself in relationship to the various referential contexts in which that act occurs. There is only one saving mystery of Christ that elicits the inward act of faith, but that saving mystery both expresses itself (through the biblical *kerygma*) and is received and understood in the course of the church's history in a variety of different contexts and through a diversity of 'structurising elements.' The constant factor, therefore, is neither the act or intentionality of faith itself nor the 'structurising' elements that are used to express it, but rather it is the proportional relationship between the two, as they both shape the understanding of the one saving mystery of Christ" (Thompson, 117–18). The bottom line is that to articulate any enduring *propositional* truth about "the one saving mystery of Christ" becomes functionally impossible. Any particular past dogmatic formulation is at best "the true expression of an earlier experience of faith" and "must be valued within the context of its particular time and recognized also as a bearer of that experience of faith to the next era" (Thompson, 126–27). Rahner's view is similar.

8. *Donum Veritatis* §17.
9. *Donum Veritatis* §23.
10. *Donum Veritatis* §24.

teaching. When considering significant resistance to a particular magisterial teaching or teachings, theologians should strive to abide by the following rule: "When there is a question of the communion of faith, the principle of the 'unity of truth' (*unitas veritatis*) applies. When it is a question of differences which do not jeopardize this communion, the 'unity of charity' (*unitas caritatis*) should be safeguarded."[11]

11. *Donum Veritatis* §26. The Instruction adds, "The preceding considerations have a particular application to the case of the theologian who might have serious difficulties, for reasons which appear to him well founded, in accepting a non-irreformable magisterial teaching. Such a disagreement could not be justified if it were based solely upon the fact that the validity of the given teaching is not evident or upon the opinion that the opposite position would be the more probable. Nor, furthermore, would the judgment of the subjective conscience of the theologian justify it because conscience does not constitute an autonomous and exclusive authority for deciding the truth of a doctrine. In any case there should never be a diminishment of that fundamental openness loyally to accept the teaching of the Magisterium as is fitting for every believer by reason of the obedience of faith. The theologian will strive then to understand this teaching in its contents, arguments, and purposes. This will mean an intense and patient reflection on his part and a readiness, if need be, to revise his own opinions and examine the objections which his colleagues might offer him. If, despite a loyal effort on the theologian's part, the difficulties persist, the theologian has the duty to make known to the Magisterial authorities the problems raised by the teaching in itself, in the arguments proposed to justify it, or even in the manner in which it is presented. He should do this in an evangelical spirit and with a profound desire to resolve the difficulties. His objections could then contribute to real progress and provide a stimulus to the Magisterium to propose the teaching of the Church in greater depth and with a clearer presentation of the arguments. In cases like these, the theologian should avoid turning to the 'mass media,' but have recourse to the responsible authority, for it is not by seeking to exert the pressure of public opinion that one contributes to the clarification of doctrinal issues and renders service to the truth. It can also happen that at the conclusion of a serious study, undertaken with the desire to heed the Magisterium's teaching without hesitation, the theologian's difficulty remains because the arguments to the contrary seem more persuasive to him. Faced with a proposition to which he feels he cannot give his intellectual assent, the theologian nevertheless has the duty to remain open to a deeper examination of the question. For a loyal spirit, animated by love for the Church, such a situation can certainly prove a difficult trial. It can be a call to suffer for the truth, in silence and prayer,

On this basis, *Donum Veritatis* proceeds to undertake a lengthy analysis of the phenomenon of dissent, as found since the Second Vatican Council. As the Instruction observes, dissenters justify their positions on various grounds, including conscience, Christian freedom, the fact that a large number of Catholics oppose a particular teaching, and the notion that magisterial teaching is fundamentally as debatable as any theological intervention. For example, in his 1973 book *The Remaking of the Church: An Agenda for Reform*, published the year before he became president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Richard McBrien suggested that "the Church must . . . demythologize its understanding of the papacy," rejected the consistent practice of the Church regarding the reservation of the priesthood to men, and urged that all Catholics need to become resisters of the Church's teaching office as part of "summoning the whole Church along the path of self-determination and thereby toward continued growth in Christ."[12] Echoing a March 31, 1972, statement signed by many internationally prominent Catholic theologians, McBrien argues that no one may rightly remain silent and that everyone must participate in "applying constant pressure from below."[13]

Similarly, the eminent moral theologian and dissenter Bernard Häring differentiates resistance—which he approves—from rebellion. In his view, he and other theologians like him are responding directly to the Magisterium *of Jesus*

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but with the certainty, that if the truth really is at stake, it will ultimately prevail" (*Donum Veritatis* §§28–31).

12. Richard P. McBrien, *The Remaking of the Church: An Agenda for Reform* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 92, 101.

13. McBrien, *Remaking of the Church*, 146. In his book's concluding paragraph, McBrien offers a clarion call of hope, emblematic of his vision of what matters for true Christianity: "For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in his Spirit nurtured on earth the values of co-responsibility, accountability, unpretentious service, individual rights, freedom, human dignity, equal justice for all regardless of sex or race, truthfulness, fraternal love of all Christians, and indeed all the good fruits of our ecclesial nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured. This will be so when Christ hands over to the Father a Kingdom eternal and universal" (147–48).

*Christ*, bypassing (on the contested matters) the faulty current Magisterium *of the Church*. He argues that theologians are doing so under the impulse of Christ's Spirit and with attention to prophetic voices and to "the poor, the rejected, the cry of the plundered planet earth"—endangered especially by "the fact that the human population explosion, along with global migration, has skyrocketed the crime rate and the inclination to violence."[14] Häring maintains that theologians who adhere to the Magisterium *of Christ* in opposition to the Magisterium of the Church in areas where Catholic moral teaching has been consistent since the outset are not a negative "countermagisterium." Rather, such theologians listen critically but respectfully to the papal Magisterium, which they then resist and reject where they deem necessary in conscience, under the Spirit's guidance and out of a direct fidelity to Christ.

Thirty-four years later, those whom *Donum Veritatis* and (later) *Veritatis Splendor* identified as dissenters—and their disciples, holding views like McBrien's and Häring's—are still vocal and public in their views. But their views are no longer

14. Bernard Häring, CSsR, *My Hope for the Church: Critical Encouragement for the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1999), 102 and 64. For further discussion of Häring's project, see chapter 4 and the conclusion of my *The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), along with the secondary literature cited there. See also John T. Noonan Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). Noonan raises three issues where he argues the Church has reversed its longstanding moral teaching: slavery, usury, and religious freedom. He thinks that other consistent Catholic moral teachings will undergo similar reversal, such as the ban upon contraception. In my view, his suggestion that the Church consistently and definitively taught in favor of slavery is incorrect; and his presentation of the Church's teachings on usury and religious freedom seriously exaggerates what has been reversed. Certainly, the council fathers at Vatican II did not think they were rupturing a definitive teaching of the Church. This matters because the Church's consistent moral teachings flow from the New Testament and cannot be discarded without undermining the Church's handing on of divine revelation, as I indicate in my *Aquinas's Eschatological Ethics and the Virtue of Temperance* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

condemned as dissent by the Magisterium. In fact, the dissenters' perspective arguably predominated at the recent Synod on Synodality, which focused to a significant degree on matters that *Donum Veritatis* understood to have been settled by definitive magisterial teaching. Rather ironically, sharp critiques of the papal Magisterium have in recent years arisen from John Paul II Institutes around the world, known for their longtime opposition to the views of the dissenters. As a result, one John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family has been radically restructured by the Vatican, and another has been shut down.

Are the theologians who in 1990 embraced *Donum Veritatis* now the new "dissenters," reversing places with the theologians who rejected *Donum Veritatis* and whose views now seem more in favor?[15] If so, is the whole thing arbitrary,

15. Much of the answer to this question will depend upon the degree to which religiously liberal Catholic theology from the period 1967–73 emerges victorious in the coming years. Tracey Rowland rightly directs attention to Charles Davis's seminal "Theology and Praxis," *Cross Currents* 23 (1973): 154–68. Davis's final paragraph raises the fundamental question (with Davis agreeing with Schillebeeckx): "Is theology, as Schillebeeckx says, the critical self-consciousness of Christian *praxis*, or is [Leszek] Kołakowski right when he says: 'For theology begins with the belief that truth has already been given to us, and its intellectual effort consists not of an attrition against reality but of an assimilation of something which exists already in its entirety'?" ("Theology and Praxis," 167, quoted in Rowland, "Between the Theory and the Praxis of the Synodal Process," *The Thomist* 87 [2023]: 233–54, at 237). Rowland correctly observes, "The reason Davis's question is so important is that if Critical Theory or some other version of a priority of *praxis* theory becomes the intellectual partner for theology, then almost every branch of theology is open for a radical revision" (Rowland, "Between the Theory and the Praxis of the Synodal Process," 237, with reference to a similar conclusion drawn by Joseph Ratzinger in his late-1970s essay "Questions about the Structure of Theology," in his *Principles of Catholic Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987], 315–31, at 318). Davis had been a prominent British Catholic theologian until, shortly after the Council, he left the priesthood and the Church—as did many others at the time. For his reasons for rejecting Catholicism, see his *A Question of Conscience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); and see also the response by his religiously liberal Catholic confrere Gregory Baum in *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). A key element of

depending simply upon who holds papal power at the moment? Given that the previous "dissenters" spent nearly five decades decrying and vocally undermining papal authority—prior to coming to appreciate papal authority under Pope Francis—should their opponents today imitate their mode of resistance?[16]

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Davis's rationale for leaving the Catholic Church is his rejection of its "hierarchical structure of power, centered on the papal monarchy"—not least due to its being "inappropriate for Christian mission" given the new human self-understanding that cannot be squared with static, hierarchical, non-provisional institutional structures (Davis, *Question for Conscience*, 119–21; cf. 178). Davis also rejects the notions that the Catholic Church has retained the unity promised by Christ and that the Catholic Church visibly has embodied "Christian faith, hope, and love" (178); and he rejects the Marian dogmas and the dogma of papal infallibility. He sums up: "The modern rebellion against the Church is the determination of men to be themselves. . . . In its present social structure, the Church is unable to allow a consistent acceptance of the change in man's self-understanding. So, instead of encouraging and guiding men's development as self-creative persons and the advance of human community through freely constituted meaning, it constantly tries to restrict men by insisting upon its own authority and by reference to a statically conceived natural law. Men, however, have had enough. They want to grow and be themselves. If the Church will not allow this: well, so much the worse for the Church" (218). This statement of protest helps to explain why the Synodal process today is focused on changing the Church's power structures and on allowing and approving sexual self-definition—but the protest does not take seriously enough the possibility that Christ's Church, and the teaching of the natural law, mediate divine truth about human flourishing and beatitude.

16. The problem is compounded by the tendency of theologians to amplify their praise of popes who share their favored perspectives, as for example the remark of Juan Carlos Scannone, SJ, in concluding his *Theology of the People: The Pastoral and Theological Roots of Pope Francis* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2021): "For Bergoglio is not only the 'pope of the people' (of the faithful people of God and of the peoples of the earth) but also the 'pope of discernment' of the signs of our times" (201). On what grounds could one challenge this papal discernment, especially if "a people is always in the process of building . . . and to understand this the static category of substance does not help us, but rather those of relation and process" (185)? Scannone highlights Pope Francis's debts to the Argentine "theology of the people" and to Romano Guardini, as well as to Karl Rahner: "Rahner, though he was not personally familiar with Latin America, had a fine sense for the new theological contributions and therefore edited two books about what was coming from the continent: *Teología liberadora* and *Religión popular-religión del pueblo*.

I address these issues in the present essay, guided by de Lubac's instructive insistence upon differentiating his resistance in 1950 from the kind of resistance undertaken by the postconciliar dissenters. The heart of my essay will be the importance of receptivity—both to divine revelation in Christ and to the ongoing ecclesial mediation of divine revelation. I argue that Catholics must adopt a firm stance of receptivity to the ecclesial mediation of the Word of God by the Magisterium of the Church, and not only when the Magisterium is congenial to the theologian's perspective. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church nourishes us with true sacraments and true teachings, thereby giving us spiritual birth in Christ and guiding us to

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The first dealt with liberation theology. Regarding the second subject (popular religion), Vatican II had not addressed it, but it emerged from Latin American reality and from postconciliar ministry and reflection, particularly in Argentina. Today, Pope Francis, who knows it firsthand, has given special relevance to it in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*" (168). I am also struck, uncomfortably, by Scannone's summation of his (and Pope Francis's) philosophical vision. He argues that Catholic philosophy even before the Council "had already overcome the mere classic paradigm of substance and was overcoming the modern one of subject, moving toward a new paradigm that was not only theological but also historical-cultural. While the first two paradigms privileged identity, need, intelligibility, and eternity as characteristic traits of the first principle and therefore of the understanding of God, the emerging paradigm, which implies a reassessment of the category of relationship over that of substance, without denying those characteristics, rethinks them from the basis of difference of alterity (the relationship), the mystery revealed *as* mystery, the gratuitousness of the gift, and therefore the unpredictable historical novelty" (127; cf. 107–9, verging on the post-metaphysical and inevitably unstable hermeneutical theology that one finds in Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, and Claude Geffré, OP, among others; see Schillebeeckx, "Towards a Catholic Use of Hermeneutics," in *God the Future of Man*, trans. N.D. Smith [New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968], 1–49; and Geffré, *A New Age in Theology: The Marriage of Faith and History and the De-Ghettoization of Christian Thought* [New York: Paulist, 1974]—a theological approach that is well critiqued by Thomas Joseph White, OP, in his *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015], 470–86). See also Gerard Mannion, "A Teaching Church That Learns? Discerning 'Authentic' Teaching in Our Times," in *The Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity*, ed. Michael J. Lacey and Francis Oakley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 161–92.

eternal life with Christ and the blessed. The Church, therefore, is a mother to us who should be respected and reverenced.

At the same time, I will also maintain that some kinds of resistance are or can be appropriate. The use of the term "resistance" is controversial, given that theologians (and Catholics) must be receptive to the contemporary Magisterium, and also given the currently fraught ecclesiastical context.[17] Let me therefore explain my use of the term a bit further, by reference to a 2001 document of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). This document addresses the fact that some moral theologians in the late twentieth century justified their dissent from the Magisterium by noting that theologians such as de Lubac had conflicted with the Magisterium and had been vindicated. The CDF document replies by distinguishing between "tension" and "opposition." The latter comes about "when the search for truth is undertaken without regard for the Church's doctrinal inheritance and becomes hardened into ambiguous or patently erroneous positions."[18] The conflict between the Magisterium of Pope Pius XII and the ressourcement theologians who were silenced in the 1950s did not involve such opposition, and therefore rose solely to the level of acceptable "tension."

Accepting the CDF document's distinction between tension and opposition, I note that "tension" intrinsically involves—as both a reality of physics and an intellectual reality—some kind of resistance. It is such resistance, as distinct from opposition, that I ascribe to de Lubac in this essay. It is a resistance or tension within a firm stance of receptivity to Mother Church. It allows for raising concerns and indeed resisting in certain

17. For this fraught context, see, for example, the recent article by Gerhard Cardinal Müller, "Does *Fiducia Supplicans* Affirm Heresy?" *First Things*, February 16, 2024, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2024/02/does-fiducia-supplicans-affirm-heresy.

18. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Some Comments on the Notification of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding Certain Writings of Fr. Marciano Vidal, C.Ss.R.," no. 5, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010515_vidal-2_en.html.

ways a line of teaching set forth by the Magisterium, but always within limits. It cannot become opposition without ceasing to be what de Lubac and other members of the ressourcement movement practiced. They maintained obedience and reverence for the papacy and the Church's moral and doctrinal inheritance while critiquing (often in implicit ways, but clear enough to everyone at the time) both the Curia and some aspects of some papal documents. St. John Henry Newman did the same in his day vis-à-vis the Magisterium of Pope Pius IX. I have chosen to use the term "resistance" because "tension" sounds vaguer than what actually occurred: there was tension because there was *resistance* (within receptivity), even though there was not opposition.

My essay begins with three sections that highlight the fundamental character of receptivity: on Galatians 4's complex image of the Church as mother; on the centrality of receptivity in light of the work of David L. Schindler and Hans Urs von Balthasar; and on the Virgin Mary as the actively receptive and obedient archetype of the Church. Marian receptivity, as Schindler observes, often garners little respect in contemporary Western society. But members of Mother Church, including the pope and bishops, must receive the Gospel that they hand on. All members of (Marian) Mother Church must therefore exhibit Marian receptivity, and this is particularly evident in receiving the teachings of the Magisterium. My fourth and final section then examines the perspective and practice of de Lubac. As noted above, while emphasizing the importance of receptivity to Mother Church, de Lubac found himself in some significant conflict with the Magisterium of Pope Pius XII and therefore in a stance of resistance (producing "tensions") to some of what Mother Church was teaching through the pope. After being rehabilitated and largely triumphing at Vatican II,[19]

19. See Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Vatican Council Notebooks*, 2 vols., trans. Andrew Stefanelli and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2015–16). See also Karl Heinz Neufeld, "Henri de Lubac SJ als Konzilstheologe," *Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift* 134 (1986): 149–59; Aaron Riches, "Henri de Lubac and the Second Vatican

de Lubac presaged conflicts that the Church faces today when, in 1971, he published *The Motherhood of the Church* as a sorrowful response to the postconciliar emergence of a powerful strain of Catholic religious liberalism.

My argument in this fourth section is that de Lubac still has much to teach us about how Marian receptivity to Mother Church (whose model is Mary) and a certain kind of resistance, different from that of the postconciliar dissenters and different from "opposition," can be faithfully united. De Lubac did not resist weighty and consistent Church teachings, nor did he publicly and vociferously engage in denouncing the pope (as the postconciliar dissenters did for five decades). De Lubac repeatedly affirmed that Mother Church, through the Magisterium, truly mediates Christ's truth in the Holy Spirit; and he lived this commitment. But he did resist the Magisterium in his scholarly work when he perceived the pope to be repressing a legitimate movement or an enduring perspective in theology. He understood his resistance to be done in accordance with the truth of Mother Church, never in opposition to the Church's teaching.

After the council, de Lubac sounded the alarm regarding Catholic religious liberalism of the kind noted above in McBrien and Häring. According to de Lubac—and I agree with him—the latter cannot be a path down which the Church's Magisterium could authoritatively go. This is the case because Catholic religious liberalism, when logically followed through, undermines the very basis of magisterial authority and the notion of a trustworthy Mother Church, as Pope Pius X already solemnly taught in the early twentieth century. The ruptures called for by the postconciliar dissenters, if ever they were to occur in pastoral forms (since I do not believe they could occur in dogmatically heretical forms), would have to be "resisted"; there would inevitably be some tensions. But these seeming ruptures could only be rightly resisted in full communion with

Council," in *T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 121–56.

Mother Church from a stance of firm receptivity and obedience to papal authority, not opposition.

There is an evident balancing act here. Theological resistance-within-receptivity, in order to maintain a concrete commitment to the Church as our mother, could not be of a kind that would tear down or vocally abuse the Magisterium by which Mother Church instructs us and by which the Church's motherhood manifests itself. But theological resistance or tensions would be appropriate if the Magisterium were going down a path that would undermine Mother Church by seemingly threatening the doctrinal and moral inheritance that Mother Church exists to mediate.

The main question at hand, then, is whether such a balancing act between—or, better, *profound integration of*—receptivity and resistance is possible, creating "tensions" but avoiding "opposition." Let me begin by sketching the Church's motherhood as understood by the Apostle Paul, in light of Jesus Christ's fulfillment of God's covenantal promises.

## II. Galatians 4: The Church as Mother

The Apostle Paul, in his Letter to the Galatians, interprets Genesis's story of Sarah and Hagar, with their respective sons Isaac and Ishmael, as an allegory.[20] Although Genesis itself does not intend an allegorical meaning, Paul takes the liberty of reading it in that way in order to drive home a theological point to his audience. His point is that Jesus Christ has saved us not through the Mosaic law but through his cross and Resurrection, and so we Christians do not need to obey the fine points of Torah—as distinct from the Decalogue. The allegory is a polemical one since it argues that the Jewish people who have not confessed Jesus to be the Messiah are in slavery to sin.

Paul states that in Genesis's story about Sarah and her slave Hagar, "the son of the slave was born according to the flesh,

20. For issues raised by Galatians 4 and similar New Testament texts, see my *Engaging the Doctrine of Israel: A Christian Israelology in Dialogue with Ongoing Judaism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021).

the son of the free woman through promise" (Gal 4:23). The latter involves a covenantal promise that points to Jesus since Jesus fulfills it. The "flesh" in Paul's allegory stands for Torah observance and, more specifically, circumcision. Whereas Jews understand themselves to descend from Sarah and to be the family of God's promise, Paul (himself a Jew) contends that Christians (whether Jewish or Gentile) are now the true descendants of Sarah because they have embraced the true child of the promise—namely, Jesus, the Messiah. By contrast, says Paul, having rejected the true child of the promise (Jesus), the non-Christian Jews are now descendants of the child of the flesh (Esau) and remain in slavery to sin due to the futility of salvation through Torah observance.

For Paul, the Abrahamic covenant of promise is associated not with the present Jerusalem or the bounded land of Israel but with the kingdom that Jesus has inaugurated. Since Jesus presently reigns at the right hand of the Father, Paul calls this inaugurated kingdom "the Jerusalem above" (Gal 3:26; cf. Rev 21:10; Heb 12:22–24; and Col 3:1, 3–4). Christians have their faith-existence not in "the present Jerusalem" but instead in "the Jerusalem above" (Gal 4:26). This heavenly Jerusalem, grounded in the saving work of the Messiah, is free of the crushing burden of sin and death. Regarding "the Jerusalem above," Paul says that "she is our mother" (Gal 4:26). The identification of the heavenly Jerusalem as "our mother" leads to the identification of the Church as our mother. This is so because the heavenly Jerusalem is the perfected Church.

Why is it helpful to think of the Church as our mother? The Church is like Sarah, greatly desiring to bear children. The Church exists to bring about children of God in the order of grace, adopted sons and daughters in the Son, Jesus Christ. Paul recognizes that, in the name of the Church, he himself is a "mother." He tells the Galatians, "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal 4:19). Paul regularly tells the story of salvation in terms of spiritual children. God has sent his Son so that we might be freed from slavery to sin and become his adopted sons and

daughters. Paul states, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, to receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir" (Gal 4:4–7; cf. Rom 8:14–17).

The fundamental purpose of the Church is to enable human beings to become God's adopted children in Christ through the power of Christ's death and Resurrection and by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Church, therefore, mothers us in Christ, giving birth to us through faith and baptism. Mother Church nourishes us with the saving truth of the Word of God, with the sacraments, and with all the things that we need in order to come together and flourish in faith, hope, and love as God's adopted children. Mother Church carries us in her secure womb until we are born into eternal life. Of course, Christ himself also shows motherly virtues, as for instance when he says sorrowfully over Jerusalem, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Luke 13:34). Christ's Church, therefore, is our mother.

## III. David L. Schindler and Hans Urs von Balthasar: Receptivity and the Marian Church

The late Catholic theologian David L. Schindler provides further insight into why the image of Mother Church is so valuable. In an essay titled "Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization," Schindler focuses not on the Church's maternal mediation but on our receptivity, which makes sense given that there can be no ecclesial mediation if there is no receptivity. If people simply ignore their pastors or priests, if the Church's authority means nothing except for those on its payroll, then there can be no mediation worthy of the name.

Schindler defends creaturely receptivity as an ontological perfection rooted in the receptivity of the Son to the Father in

the Trinity.[21] Sonship can aptly lead our minds to appreciate the goodness of receptivity. Such a move pays off when it comes to appreciating the mystery of creation—which not only reveals its source in the one God but also exhibits Trinitarian traces.[22]

Discussing the ontology of the creature, Schindler observes, "What the creature first 'does' is receive its be-ing (being): what it first 'does' is 'be.' In technical philosophical terms, the creature's '*agere*' (or 'second act') thus consists most properly in its freely taking over and recapitulating the receptive feature that is always-already inscribed in its *esse* (or 'first act')."[23] The very *esse* of the creature—while comprising a real substance or essence—is relational, receptive toward the divine Giver of all finite being.[24] Schindler argues that all good

21. Thomas Joseph White, OP, helpfully distinguishes Balthasar's emphasis on the Son's receptivity from some of Balthasar's other reflections on the Son and on Trinitarian ontology. White remarks,

> Balthasar . . . follows Barth unambiguously in ascribing to the Son of God a capacity for obedience even in his divine essence. In fact, Balthasar goes further than Barth does explicitly, in speaking of a divine self-emptying, passivity, or receptivity within the Godhead. This is something distinct from the receptivity of the person of the Son (who receives his personal being from the Father through eternal generation). A notion of receptivity of this kind is traditional and proper to any coherent Trinitarian theology. By contrast, self-emptying or passivity in the essence of the Godhead itself is something else. Such a receptivity would suggest diverse modes of being (as gift on the one hand and receptivity on the other) *within* the simple, immutable, eternal essence of God. (White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Study in Thomistic Christology* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015], 432)

22. See Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 685–86; Robert Barron, "The Metaphysics of Coinherence: A Meditation on the Essence of the Christian Message," in Barron, *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 31–43; Peter Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2015).

23. David L. Schindler, "Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization," *Communio* 20 (1993): 200–39, at 220.

24. I note here that receptivity does not have ontological priority to substantial being in creatures. Steven A. Long puts the matter well:

creaturely acts must bear the mark of the creature's act-of-being, precisely by being in some way informed or shaped by receptivity. Put in terms of Greek philosophical wisdom, the human creature must be fundamentally shaped not by autonomous *technē* but by contemplative *theoria*.

Balthasar emphasizes that being receptive does not mean being less active. The example of bearing a child, which only women can do, confirms this. There is a fundamentally receptive fruitfulness involved in the conception of a child, but the egg is fully "active" in the process of conception, and, when one factors in pregnancy (and lactation), "the woman exhibits an activity which is significantly superior to the man's."[25] The point is that receptivity can be active, and indeed, Mother Church is actively receptive vis-à-vis Christ and the Spirit. Believers, in receiving the Word and sacraments from Mother Church, should likewise exhibit an active receptivity, working to receive and incorporate Christ's gifts in the Spirit.

Balthasar's valuation of receptivity is taken up by Schindler in his ontological emphasis that creaturely being is primarily receptive. Schindler hammers home the point that the true nature of human existence is not primarily revealed by human works, human making, human doing. Rather, the

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> It may sound good to say that the creature is constituted by its relation to God, but this is not true: the creature is not constituted by its relation to God, but by God; and for God to constitute or cause is not for God to change or be really related, but for the creature to be. The effect of God is the very being of the creature; insofar and inasmuch as the creature exists, it is therefore related to God as its cause. . . . Hence the analogical formality of being is prior to and the basis of the real relations of creatures to God, and it is necessarily ontologically prior to the relation of createdness, prior to the relation of causal participation (the creature participates nothing until it exists). (Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011], 9–10)

Schindler's broad point holds even with this clarification.

25. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "A Word on 'Humanae Vitae,'" in *New Elucidations*, trans. Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 204–28, at 213.

deepest nature of human existence is revealed by active receptivity to divine gift, a receptivity that is fruitful.

It may seem that by associating the Church with maternal active receptivity and fruitfulness (in relation to Christ's gifting), theologians have downgraded men—since they are not Christ and are not representative of the Church either. This problem goes back to Ephesians 5, with its presentation of the Church as Christ's spouse, and of course, it goes back further to the Old Testament's frequent presentation of Israel as the bride or spouse of YHWH. Schindler underscores that men and women share a common human nature. It is not as though there are two "halves" (male and female) that make up one "whole," as in Plato's *Symposium*. It remains the case, nevertheless, that human creaturely and ecclesial being is fundamentally receptive. Both Balthasar and Schindler push this in a Marian direction, with attention to her *fiat*. In her response to the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation—"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38)—Mary articulates her graced active receptivity, her openness to the Word and Spirit.

The notion of the self-made man or, more radically, of human technological progress toward a form of deification cuts against the primacy of receptivity. In the Christian context, it cuts against the willingness of persons to receive the Word and sacrament from the Church that authoritatively hands on and interprets Scripture and Tradition through the Magisterium. Efficiency, mastery, and specialization are privileged in a culture that values knowledge as power. By contrast, a culture of love values contemplation and receptivity.

For Balthasar and Schindler, the danger facing the Church and culture today is the extinction of receptivity, which would mean the end of the creature's fundamental "receptive" or "feminine" posture in the light of the divine gift of being. Both theologians understand that it is mistaken to romanticize motherhood or to limit women's societal roles to motherhood and domesticity. Their focus, however, is on the restriction of human dignity to productive agency. Not power, but rather

contemplation and receptivity, are the real measure of human dignity.

The centrality of receptivity for the Church's mediation of Christ's gifting should be evident. The Church must receive from Christ in the Spirit. Believers, or members of the Church, must receive from the Church the gifts of Word and sacrament. Without receptivity at its very center, the Church collapses into a human construction that is merely about power. The knowledge claimed by the Church would be exposed as simply an excuse for exercising power, not love.[26]

## IV. Mary and the Church

The Virgin Mary exemplifies both active receptivity and motherhood in the supernatural economy of salvation. It is not for nothing that Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, places Mariology in the context, and indeed as the capstone, of ecclesiology. *Lumen Gentium* states, "The blessed Virgin, through the gift and office of the divine motherhood which unites her with the Son the redeemer, and by reason of her singular graces and gifts, is also intimately united to the church: the mother of God is the type of the church."[27] *Lumen Gentium* goes on to describe the Church as "mother."[28] Mary carries out a motherly role in the Church, cooperating with a "motherly love" in the spiritual birth and raising to maturity of the Church's children.[29]

Mary preeminently receives her Son—not only physically in her womb but also spiritually through faith and love. All her privileges are gifts; at the core of her spiritual being is active receptivity, which makes her fruitful for the whole world. *Lumen Gentium* adds that "the maternal role of Mary toward

26. This is the perspective of Marxism and Critical Theory, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault.

27. *Lumen Gentium* §63, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent-Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, SJ (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 849–98, at 896.

28. *Lumen Gentium* §63, 896.

29. *Lumen Gentium* §63, 896.

humanity in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ; rather, it shows forth its power. For every saving influence that the blessed Virgin has on humanity arises not from any natural necessity but from the divine good pleasure."[30]

Quoting both Galatians 4:26 and John Calvin, the Protestant theologian Max Thurian commented around the same time that *Lumen Gentium* was promulgated: "The Church . . . has no truer or greater title than that of 'Mother.'"[31] Thurian argues that this title best articulates the vocation of the Church—namely, to give spiritual birth to sons and daughters in the Son. Mary is, therefore, an image of Mother Church. As he says, "Neither the Gospel nor past Christian tradition has been able to separate Mary and the Church. To speak of Mary is to speak of the Church. The two are united in one fundamental vocation—maternity."[32] Mary is physically and spiritually the Mother of her Son by the grace of the Spirit; the Church is spiritually the Mother of sons and daughters in the Son by the grace of the Spirit. Mary's "messianic motherhood" makes her "the symbol of the Church, the Mother of the Faithful."[33] Salvation history, from this angle, is a history of mothering and nurturing God's people unto deification.

Many Catholic theologians contemporaneous with Thurian also drew connections between Mary and Mother Church. For example, Hugo Rahner's *Maria und die Kirche* begins with reflections that are quite similar to Thurian's. He states, "The early Christians' devotion to Mother Church always went hand-in-hand with their devotion to the Mother of God, and this was

30. *Lumen Gentium* §60, p. 895.

31. Max Thurian, *Mary: Mother of the Lord, Figure of the Church*, trans. Neville B. Cryer (London: Mowbray, 1985), 9. For Calvin's presentation of the Church as mother, insisting on the necessity of the Church's mediation of the Gospel, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.1.1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 281–85.

32. Thurian, *Mary*, 9.

33. Thurian, *Mary*, 25.

because they still realized that the whole mystery as presented in the Scriptures shows Mary, the virgin mother, to be essentially the symbol of the Church, our mother."[34] Mother Mary and Mother Church reflect each other. Mary's graced openness to God's will, faith and humility, and cooperation in the saving mysteries of her Son have ecclesiological correlates. Rahner, therefore, contends that "in the inspired Scriptures, what is said in the widest sense of the Virgin Mother the Church, is said in a special sense of the Virgin Mary. And what is spoken of the Virgin Mother Mary in a personal way, can rightly be applied in a general way to the Virgin Mother of the Church."[35] Mary's motherhood of her Son is paralleled by the Church's motherhood, in the spiritual order, of sons and daughters in the incarnate Son who are destined to share in the life of God.

Hans Urs von Balthasar pushes these connections further. He highlights the "freedom of Mary's Yes from all hesitation" and her "guileless openness to every disposition of God."[36] He expands upon this openness or receptivity by drawing upon his category of childlikeness, rooted in Matthew 18:3–4, where Jesus teaches that "unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Mary's humility is the greatest, the most childlike receptivity. Aware of the cruciform character of Mary's vocation (which he does not romanticize), Balthasar comments,

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34. Hugo Rahner, SJ, *Our Lady and the Church*, trans. Sebastian Bullough, OP (Bethesda, MD: Zaccheus, 2004), x. See also Alois Müller, *Ecclesia-Maria: Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1953); Otto Semmelroth, *Mary, Archetype of the Church*, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963); Gérard Philips, "Mariologische Perspectieven: Maria en de Kerk," *Mariale Dagen* 12 (1953): 9–78.

35. Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, xii.

36. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Mary in the Church's Doctrine and Devotion," in Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 99–124, at 105. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991).

"Mary's humility is not that of the contrite sinner; rather, it is a blithe, unselfconscious, childlike humility that would never get the idea that anything she had was her property instead of God's gift."[37] Because she knows that everything she possesses is divine gift, she is like a "child"—she is "greatest in the kingdom of heaven." In her graced receptivity, says Balthasar, she is "the archetypal Church, whose form we have to take as our pattern."[38]

Receptivity fundamentally involves amazement, gratitude, and thanksgiving for the gift of being. To be actively receptive to God's gifting means to desire to share these gifts with others. Balthasar comments that the believer "must show that he has understood God's gesture of gift-giving by taking it over and becoming a giver: not only in the generation of children, but in every kind of human communication and fruitfulness."[39] Grace has a radical newness that, while being clearly distinct from nature, amplifies the natural requisite of thanksgiving.[40]

Balthasar emphasizes that the Church—and thus the members of the Church (including the Petrine office)—is always marked by a Marian stance of receptivity or "ontological gratitude," insofar as we receive the divine gift.[41] This

37. Balthasar, "Mary in the Church's Doctrine and Devotion," 123.

38. Balthasar, 123.

39. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Marian Mold of the Church," in *Mary: The Church at the Source*, 125–44, at 129.

40. Regarding nature and grace, Balthasar comments: "Grace does something new. It elevates man, in Christ, to an immediate filiation vis-à-vis God the Father, gives him birth 'from God,' and liberates him from the entanglements of sin, in which he lives turned away from God. In this respect, grace clearly stands apart from the realm of nature. True, in the concrete the two domains intimately penetrate each other because of the Incarnation of God in Christ. Nevertheless, we cannot infer from this that they are no longer distinct principles" ("Marian Mold of the Church," 129).

41. Balthasar, "Marian Mold of the Church," 140. See also Balthasar's reflections in *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, trans. Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986). Balthasar includes a lengthy section in this book on "The All-embracing Motherhood of the Church," 183–225. He comments, "Both the Marian and the Petrine principles are coextensive with the Church: 'The entire Church

stance, Balthasar thinks, justifies the feminine imagery that surrounds the Church (and Israel) in Scripture. He affirms Matthias Joseph Scheeben's dictum that "the mystery of Mary and the mystery of the Church penetrate and illuminate each other perichoretically, [so] that neither can be correctly situated and explained without the other."[42] Scheeben himself uses the word "perichoresis" and explains that it means an "intrinsic union and similarity."[43] Mary's motherhood and the Church's motherhood share a foundation in the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who enables Mary and the Church to be fruitful. Scheeben defines the Church's fruitfulness as analogous to Mary's bearing of Christ since the Church bears "the Eucharistic Christ."[44] Mary's motherhood, of course, is greater than the Church's, but the analogy stands.

Balthasar deems that it will be necessary "to remold the figure of the Church as a whole—also and especially the dimension of office—so that as a whole she radiates motherhood."[45] This radiation of motherhood, however, must not

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is Marian.' As interpreted by Vatican I and Vatican II, she is also Petrine, insofar as Peter, and his successor, 'represents the Church in his person'" (*Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, 205). Even so, "qualitatively, the form of the Marian faith (consenting to God's activity) is offered to the *Catholica* as the model of all being and acting, while the catholicity of Peter's pastoral care, though all-embracing in its object, is not communicable in its specific uniqueness. For both these reasons the Petrine universality is subject to the formative influence of the Marian, but not vice versa" (206).

42. Balthasar, "Marian Mold of the Church," 141, citing Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics*, Book Five: *Soteriology*, Part Two: *The Work of Christ the Redeemer and the Role of His Virgin Mother*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021), no. 1819, p. 645.

43. Scheeben, *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics*, 5.2, no. 1819, p. 645.

44. Scheeben, p. 645.

45. Balthasar, "Marian Mold of the Church," 144. Balthasar does not idealize the Church, as though no resistance of any kind could be justified. See his "Casa Meretrix" (originally published in the 1950s), trans. John Saward, in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 2, *Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 193–288, including for instance his observation, "The Church, who is able to see and condemn herself in this way, has this strange duality within her: standing where she is, thinking

be misunderstood as somehow a less challenging vocation. Mother Church is a Church willing to obey God's will in the world even at high personal cost.

In his emphasis on Marian receptivity and fruitfulness at the heart of Mother Church, Balthasar's work in the late 1970s recalls in certain ways Henri de Lubac's *Méditation sur l'Église*, originally published in 1953. In addition to a chapter on "Ecclesia Mater," *Méditation sur l'Église* includes a final chapter on "The Church and Our Lady." Mary is a type of the Church, as de Lubac demonstrates through his characteristic method of stringing together citations from patristic and medieval authors. He states, "Our Lady is in all ways the image of the maternity of the Church."[46] He explains this point by reference to various early medieval thinkers, who observe that Mother Church continues to spiritually conceive the incarnate Word in faith and to bear him in sound doctrine and holy action.

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of how she ought to be, she [and theologians within her: Balthasar has St. Peter Damian in view here] can reject within herself what ought not to be" (262). In Balthasar's view, drawing especially upon the Church Fathers and medieval doctors, three motifs are perfectly complementary: "a bride who is even now absolutely holy (existentially and not just institutionally); a Church that is blemished both now and to the end of time; a bride who is eschatologically pure" ("Casa Meretrix," 286). That said, the difficulty of balancing Marian receptivity with some acts of resistance can be seen in these two sentences from Balthasar's *Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, 207: "From the beginning the Marian principle is thus the exact opposite of any 'partial identification' where discipleship depends on the measure of one's personal comprehension or 'responsible' evaluation. But it is equally the opposite of the passive indifference of a mere instrument that can be manipulated at will." Like de Lubac, Balthasar prior to the council resisted some aspects of the Magisterium while recognizing—in a book published in 1974, responding to the same Catholic religious liberalism that so concerned de Lubac in the early 1970s—that "Peter really needs the freedom that has had to be fought for down the centuries in the face of Conciliarism, Protestantism, Gallicanism, Jansenism, Josephism, Febronianism, etc. All these placed his office in shackles in order to claim for themselves, by stipulating conditions for 'consent' or 'reception,' the authority to 'set free'; in reality their aim was to give authoritative freedom to themselves" (*Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, 211).

46. Henri de Lubac, SJ, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 321.

Augustine regularly presents the Church as a Virgin Mother, bearing children in the Spirit. Like Scheeben, whom he cites, de Lubac emphasizes the Eucharist: "Just as the maternal function of Mary is to give the God-Man to the world, so the maternal function of the Church, which culminates . . . in the celebration of the Eucharist, is to give us Christ."[47]

## V. Can Receptivity Be Squared with Resistance? The Example of Henri de Lubac

Thus far, I have emphasized the Marian receptivity that Mother Church and all members of Mother Church (including pope and bishops) must exemplify. Mother Church is nothing if not grounded in Christ's gifting. All the members of Mother Church must, therefore, be receptive in a Marian mode, and this involves receptivity to Christ teaching and acting through his Spirit-filled Body, the Church. In her graced receptivity, relying upon God rather than upon her own resources, Mary is the model of the Church and the model of each believer.

But what if the Church, through the Magisterium, calls upon believers to receive something that is not adequate to the full truth of the Gospel or that is pastorally misguided, as may sometimes happen, since not everything the Magisterium says or does is infallible? In this regard, de Lubac's personal story is helpful. His *Méditation sur l'Église* was published in the early 1950s, when de Lubac was in his mid-fifties.[48] Ever since his formative studies in the Jesuit novitiate, de Lubac had been

47. De Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 329.

48. For broader background to the purposes and influence of this work, see Theresa Marie Chau Nguyen, OP, *The Splendor of the Church in Mary: Henri de Lubac, Vatican II, and Marian Ressourcement* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023). See also, more broadly, Brian E. Daley, SJ, "Sign and Source of the Church: Mary in the *Ressourcement* and at Vatican II," in *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, ed. John Cavadini and Danielle Peters (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 31–54; René Laurentin, *La Vierge au concile* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965); and Brian Graebe, *Vessel of Honor: The Virgin Birth and the Ecclesiology of Vatican II* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021).

working to promote a different approach to theology than that taken by the neo-scholastic school that had been, with papal approval, at the theological and philosophical center of the Church since Pope Leo XIII's publication of the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879. In 1929, de Lubac was appointed to the chair of fundamental theology at the Université Catholique de Lyon. In his inaugural lecture on "Apologetics and Theology," de Lubac sought boldly (in Jordan Hillebert's words) "to subvert what he believe[d] to be the common methodological and metaphysical commitments underwriting both contemporary atheism and Roman Catholic neo-scholasticism."[49] The neo-scholastic form of apologetics reflects Vatican I's *Dei Filius*, which grounds apologetics in the ability of human natural reason to demonstrate God's existence, to perceive the truth of the miracles and prophecies of the prophets and of Jesus and his Apostles, and to recognize the credibility of the Catholic Church's claim to be the Church founded by Jesus.

*Méditation sur l'Église* was published three years after de Lubac, in May 1950, had been removed from teaching and ordered to cease his editorial work with *Recherches de science religieuse*. That same year, on August 12, 1950, Pope Pius XII published the encyclical *Humani Generis*, in which he warned that some theologians were seeking "to bring about a return in the explanation of Catholic doctrine to the way of speaking used in Holy Scripture and by the Fathers of the Church."[50] Pius XII grants, of course, that return to the sources is not in itself bad. He observes in this vein that "theologians must always return to the sources of divine revelation: for it belongs to them to point out how the doctrine of the living Magisterium is to be found either explicitly or implicitly in the Scriptures and in Tradition. Besides, each source of divinely revealed doctrine contains so many rich treasures of truth, that they

49. Jordan Hillebert, *Henri de Lubac and the Drama of Human Existence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021), 4.

50. Pius XII, *Humani Generis* §14, trans. N.C.W.C. (Boston: Pauline Books, n.d.).

can really never be exhausted."[51] But it remains the case that neo-scholastic (or simply Scholastic) language belongs to the magisterial presentation of dogma and cannot be responsibly neglected. Honing in on a position close to that of de Lubac in *Surnaturel* (although de Lubac strove to differentiate himself from this position since de Lubac argued that he was speaking only about this world and its actual economy, not about all possible worlds), Pius XII then has this to say about nature and grace: "Others [i.e., some contemporary theologians] destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision."[52]

In 1951, the Jesuit superior general, Jean-Baptiste Janssens, issued a letter ordering some of de Lubac's books to be removed from Jesuit libraries and providing a correct interpretation of various topics on which de Lubac had written, including the proofs of God's existence, the credibility of Christian revelation (apologetics), and the relationship of nature and grace.[53] Three of de Lubac's most notable books, *Surnaturel*, *Corpus Mysticum*, and *De la connaissance de Dieu*, were removed from libraries. Suffice it to say that at the age of fifty-five, de Lubac's career and reputation were under a dark cloud, owing largely to Pope Pius XII.

In de Lubac's 1954 "Preface to the Second Edition" of *Méditation sur l'Église*, he emphasizes that he takes nothing back from the conclusions of his previous works. He notes that one of the reviewers of the book's first edition had commented, "This book is closely connected with several previous books

51. *Humani Generis* §21.

52. *Humani Generis* §26. For further discussion, see the chapter on *Gaudium et Spes* in my *An Introduction to Vatican II as an Ongoing Theological Event* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

53. See Joseph A. Komonchak, "*Humani Generis* and *Nouvelle Théologie*," in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 138–56, at 154.

by the same author."[54] De Lubac gladly affirms that this is the case. In this preface, de Lubac explains boldly that in preparing *Méditation sur l'Église* he was not breaking new ground but rather was *extending* his "efforts—however insignificant these may have been—between the years 1945 and 1950 in particular."[55] In this context, he alludes to the crackdown on him and others that took place in 1950 and that, in 1954, was still largely in effect. In the period between 1945 and 1950, he says, he already "felt, too strongly for comfort, the gathering of those dangers which have in some cases, unfortunately, since become only too clear to all."[56]

Was de Lubac exhibiting Marian receptivity to Mother Church when in 1954, he reaffirmed the contents of his earlier work, including the controversial publications that had been removed from ecclesiastical libraries, and announced himself to be presently *extending* the very work that led to ecclesiastical censure spearheaded by Pope Pius XII? Certainly, de Lubac professes Marian receptivity toward Mother Church. He does so not only by writing in the final chapter of *Méditation sur l'Église* about the Church as our (Marian) mother but also by his remarks in the remainder of his 1954 preface. In the latter, after referring again to the accusations that led in 1950 to his removal from teaching—and after granting that if there really existed the kind of clique that *Humani Generis* portrays, it would be a matter for serious concern—de Lubac professes his abiding, deep love for the Church. He describes "the pricelessness of that good which consists, quite simply, in belonging to the Church at all."[57] He expresses joy despite the cloud overshadowing him: "Once you have got your eyes in focus, you cannot miss the wonderful blossoming that goes on everywhere in her garden. . . . Joy is still triumphant, breaking

54. Henri de Lubac, SJ, "Preface to the Second Edition," in *Splendor of the Church*, 11–13, at 11.

55. De Lubac, 11.

56. De Lubac, 11.

57. De Lubac, 12.

through the most somber of appearances and flourishing on everything that should, humanly speaking, snuff it out. Joy is over everything and the foundation of everything."[58] He concludes by asking his readers to pray for him.

In this preface, he seems to have an idea—as was in fact the case—that the younger theologians and bishops were taking up his cause, reading his books, and siding with him and his colleagues. If I read him correctly, he has significant hope that things will get better for him and for his perspective. And in fact he became, in his mid-sixties, a preeminent light of the Second Vatican Council and then became, in his seventies, a cardinal of the Catholic Church and friend of popes.[59] Posthumously, he has been appreciatively cited by name in Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, and today, he is under consideration to be raised to the stature of a "Servant of God."

In 1971, in the chaotic aftermath of Vatican II, a period in which de Lubac (and many others, including Balthasar) were shocked by the rapid disintegration of faith and the rise of a strong variant of Catholic religious liberalism, de Lubac published another book related to the Church. This new book, titled in English *The Motherhood of the Church*, was comprised of two parts: a part on *Les églises particulières dans l'Église universelle* and a part on *La maternité de l'église*.[60] The first sentence of the book's introduction quotes a 1913 letter from Jules-Émile Roberty to Charles Péguy, in which Roberty states, "The Gospel existed before the Church. It is about the only thing of which we can be certain in this world."[61]

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58. De Lubac, 12.

59. See, for example, Georges Chantraine, SJ, "Cardinal Henri de Lubac (1896–1991)," *Communio* 18 (1991): 297–303; Xavier Tillette, "Henri de Lubac: The Legacy of a Theologian," *Communio* 19 (1992): 332–41. See also Aidan Nichols, OP, "Henri de Lubac: Panorama and Proposal," *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012): 3–33; Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008).

60. See also, from the same time period, Georges Chantraine, SJ, "Catholicité et maternité de l'Église," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 94 (1972): 520–36.

61. De Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 7.

De Lubac strenuously disagrees with this claim. In his view, while the Gospel had priority when Jesus was preaching in Galilee and Judea, for us the Church inevitably has priority: we receive the Gospel from Mother Church. Jesus came to unite his disciples in one Body. There is thus really no Gospel (and no Christianity) without the Church. De Lubac is contending here against Catholic religious liberalism, in which the Church is often sharply contrasted with the Gospel.

De Lubac expresses horror that Vatican II, whose most essential doctrinal teaching is contained in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), has somehow given rise not to "a new start . . . in the accomplishment of the great mission of unity received from Christ" but instead to a surge of Catholic religious liberalism, fully evident by 1971.[62] He depicts the situation as follows: "The old seeds of dissolution gaining in virulence—a certain para-conciliar agitation foisting itself on public opinion as the only authentic interpreter of the Council's spirit—a resentment against the abuses of yesterday producing blindness to the benefits received from the Church—the opening up to the world to be evangelized turning into a mediocre and sometimes scandalous worldliness."[63] Priests and religious abandon their mission and vocation; the Church's tradition, highlighted by the ressourcement movement, is treated with disdain and neglect; theologians demand that their arbitrary dictates be embraced; "moral laxity" is "presented as the adult man's irreversible progress which the Church must confirm"; and dogma is rejected under the pretext of rejecting dogmatism, thereby threatening to destroy "the Christian faith in its original twofold character comprising an objective content received from authority."[64]

62. De Lubac, 25. For further discussion, see Christopher Walsh, "De Lubac's Critique of the Postconciliar Church," *Communio* 19 (1992): 404–32. See also Christopher Walsh, "Henri de Lubac in Connecticut: Unpublished Conferences on Renewal in the Postconciliar Period," *Communio* 23 (1996): 786–805.

63. De Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 25–26.

64. De Lubac, 26.

De Lubac knows that he will be accused by his opponents of nostalgia, unreasonable opposition to modernity, and failure to read the "signs of the times"[65]—all because he is defending core Catholic teaching that Vatican II strongly affirmed. He expresses hope for the future, but he is also well aware that "the Catholic framework has been completely shaken" and that there has been "a loss of awareness among Catholics themselves of what constitutes the unique originality of their Church."[66] While appreciating the importance of social

65. For a critique along these lines, arguing that de Lubac invented an idealized past in part due to his upbringing in a family of the French nobility (and in the context of the destruction wrought by World War I), see Robin Darling Young, "An Imagined Unity: Henri de Lubac and the Ironies of Ressourcement," *Commonweal* 15 (2012): 13–18; Young, "A Soldier of the Great War: Henri de Lubac and the Patristic Sources for a Premodern Theology," in *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics*, ed. James L. Heft with John O'Malley, SJ (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 134–63. For the opposite claim, suggesting that de Lubac helped to lead a quasi-Modernist (i.e., Catholic religious liberal) movement and then was later dismayed by the postconciliar outcome, see Jon Kirwan, *An Avant-garde Theological Generation: The* Nouvelle Théologie *and the French Crisis of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also Jon Kirwan and Matthew K. Minerd, "Translators' Introduction: A Dialogue Delayed," in *The Thomistic Response to the Nouvelle Théologie: Concerning the Truth of Dogma and the Nature of Theology*, ed. and trans. Jon Kirwan and Matthew K. Minerd (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 1–85. For a much fuller portrait of the main concerns of the *nouvelle théologie*, see for example the essays in *Ressourcement after Vatican II: Essays in Honor of Joseph Fessio, S.J.*, ed. Nicholas J. Healy Jr. and Matthew Levering (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2019); and *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). On de Lubac's motivations, see also Joseph S. Flipper, *Between Apocalypse and Eschatology: History and Eternity in Henri de Lubac* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015); and Andrew Prevot, "Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) and Contemporary Mystical Theology," in *A Companion to Jesuit Mysticism*, ed. Robert A. Maryks (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 279–309.

66. De Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 29. Note that already in 1945, de Lubac had the following to say:

> Everyone can see plainly that unbelief and indifference, in spite of some contrary trends, are spreading almost everywhere. Do we realize that one of the causes of this fact is that each year, through a series of obscure tragedies, deep within the *khagnes* of the

justice, integral development, and the Spirit's opening up of new doors, he points out that appeals to these dimensions are useless "if faith grows tepid or disappears" and "if the fabric of the Church disintegrates."[67] Large swaths of Catholic priests and laity in Europe in 1971 were demanding "structural reforms" (beyond those set in place by Vatican II), whereas de Lubac denies that such reforms can ever be "the main part of

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> provinces or of Paris, or in similar milieux, many of our young élite lose their faith while discovering a universe where Christianity seems to have no place? Tomorrow they will be the educators of our youth, the molders of opinion, the most popular of our writers. (*Paradoxes of Faith*, 46)

67. De Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 30. Already in 1945, de Lubac had perceived the danger of politicizing Christianity along purely immanent lines:

> We must avoid a certain confusion which would be fatal. Some of those who speak today of adapting Christianity would like, at bottom, to change it. Some of those who would like, they say, to "incarnate" it more would like, at bottom, to bury it. Christianity must not become "the religion of which one can make what one wills" (Franz Overbeck). A wish to "incarnate" Christianity sometimes actually leads to disincarnating it, emptying it of its substance. It becomes lost, buried in politics or in sociology or, at best, in morality. (*Paradoxes of Faith*, 64)

He adds with deep insight:

> We do not want a religion that is outside of life. All right. But what is life? We must take it as a whole. What life would be worth our love and our attention that would not reach eternal life? We want an "incarnate" religion and that's all right, too. We want it to be wholly, in all its proceedings, under the sign of the incarnation. Let us not be half-way logical, but follow to the end the way that the Incarnation opens to us. . . . Our religion, if it is incarnated and fully established in human life, must, to be faithful to Christ, implant there the cross, so as to introduce the life-giving death without which there is no glorious resurrection. But, as we are terribly and almost incurably carnal, the very resurrection of the Savior risked being misinterpreted by us. Accordingly, the resurrection is succeeded by the ascension, to show us what it meant and to force us finally to turn our eyes upward, to go beyond the earthly horizon and all that pertains to man in his natural state. (68–69)

a program that must aim at the only true renewal, spiritual renewal."[68]

In his introduction to *The Motherhood of the Church*, de Lubac posits that what has been forgotten by many Catholics in the few years since the ending of the council is the Church's receptive mediation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, "the mystery of faith, which is a mystery of life, is entrusted to 'the living Church of God, pillar and support of the truth,' which is herself included within this mystery."[69] The very heart of the Church—the *sine qua non*—is receptivity to the *mysterium fidei*. The Church lives to uphold and support, through faithful mediation, the *mysterium fidei*. Receptivity to divine revelation in Christ is the ground on which everything else depends. Communion in revealed and received truth is what enables authoritative dogmatic teaching.

At the present historical moment, suggests de Lubac, it is necessary to defend strenuously "the nature and role of authority in the Church" along with "the objectivity of dogma and the value of the sacrament."[70] According to de Lubac, the problem with religiously liberal construals of the Church's life is that they neglect and even negate receptivity and mediation of the Gospel given by God in and through Jesus Christ. They show little awareness that "the Christian life is a life received from above, a life to which we are begotten and in which we are nourished by a ministry coming from Jesus himself and which realizes historically a communion victorious over all history."[71]

What would de Lubac have done if the Magisterium had attempted to implement the religiously liberal construal of the Church's life that he excoriated in 1971? Arguably, we can find the answer in what de Lubac actually did in the early 1950s, when he found himself at odds (in certain ways at least) with

68. De Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 33. I have removed the italics from these quotations.

69. De Lubac, 34.

70. De Lubac, 35.

71. De Lubac, 35.

Pope Pius XII. Of course, de Lubac believed that his positions did not fall under the condemnations articulated by Pope Pius XII. He therefore felt comfortable maintaining his core positions—clarifying certain elements, but not backing down. Even so, he carefully expressed his complete devotion to and submission to Mother Church, from whence he received the saving Word of God and the sacraments.

On the one hand, de Lubac did not engage publicly in vocal critique of Pope Pius XII and his magisterial teachings. He made his viewpoint known, but not by hurling anathemas. I note that his obedient acceptance of the Church's sanctions and his refusal to react strongly, in a public way, against Pope Pius XII was wise. Had he reacted more strongly, he would have undermined precisely what in his life and writings he sought to defend and uplift—namely, that the Church is truly Mother Church, through whom Christ wills in the Spirit to give us his gifts. He would have fomented an attitude of suspicion toward Mother Church's mediation, an attitude that was already present and did not need to be exacerbated. In sum, he would have undermined the filial and Marian virtues that ensure Mother Church's ability to teach, sanctify, and govern.

On the other hand, he recognized that Mother Church, as represented by human agents, is capable of some error in magisterial teaching. Arguably, de Lubac's level of disagreement with *Humani Generis* exemplifies what theologians should do in such a situation. If de Lubac had been insisting against Vatican I (and against Scripture and Tradition) that nature and grace are identical in their power, or if de Lubac had contended against the Church's consistent teaching in some other manifest way, then de Lubac would have been in a position of *unwarranted* resistance to Mother Church. But de Lubac was not denying the distinction between nature and grace or the radical difference between the power of grace and what nature can accomplish on its own. De Lubac's own position was not

unprecedented in Catholic theology,[72] and his viewpoint (as he intended it) was not condemned, let alone consistently or irreversibly condemned. De Lubac never denied the enduring truth-status of dogma, even though he considered neo-scholastic theology to be unhelpful in certain ways.

In his essay "Ecclesia Mater" in *Méditation sur l'Église*, de Lubac provides an instructive portrait of the true Catholic, the *homo catholicus*—without claiming that he always measures up to this ideal. He remarks that the true Catholic "will have fallen in love with the beauty of the House of God; the Church will have stolen his heart."[73] The true Catholic will allow himself to be configured by the Church so as to be in the likeness not only of Christ but also of the Church (Mary)—since the Church is in the likeness of Christ. The true Catholic will want to embrace all the riches of the Church. The true Catholic "will be aware that through her [i.e., the Church] and through her alone he participates in the unshakeableness of God."[74] The true Catholic will make sacrifices to be in unity with the Church. The true Catholic "will allow her to judge him, and he will agree gladly to all the sacrifices demanded by her unity."[75]

Still more, de Lubac states that the true Catholic will engage in no nostalgic or corrosive critique of the present Church. Although the true Catholic will reverence Tradition and go deep into it, "the last thing he will do will be to devote himself to a cult of nostalgia, either in order to escape into an antiquity he can reshape as he likes or in order to condemn the Church of his own day."[76] The true Catholic will listen reverently to the Magisterium of the Church. De Lubac states, "He will, of course, never take it into his head to appeal from the

72. See Jacob Wood, *To Stir a Restless Heart: Thomas Aquinas and Henri de Lubac on Nature, Grace, and the Desire for God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

73. De Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 241.

74. De Lubac, 241.

75. De Lubac, 241–42.

76. De Lubac, 242.

present teaching of the Magisterium to some past situation, doctrinal or institutional, or invoke such things in order to apply to that teaching an interpretation that would in fact be an evasion; for he will always accept the teaching of the Magisterium as the absolute norm."[77]

De Lubac says all this in "Ecclesia Mater," but can it really be applied to his actions at that time? After all, de Lubac knew that he was pushing against—indeed involved in a "battle" with—the neo-scholastic perspective that was dominant in Rome among both Dominicans and Jesuits, and that Pope Pius XII firmly favored.[78] At the time of publishing "Ecclesia Mater" in his *Méditation sur l'Église*, de Lubac was under ecclesiastical penalty, and he had not repented of his perspectives. He later remarked, "The decisions made in Rome in June 1950 officially emanated solely from the General of the Society. The latter was motivated to make them, however, by the fact of 'pernicious errors on essential points of dogma' maintained by the five professors in question . . . : Fathers Emile Delaye, Henri Bouillard, Alexandre Durand, Pierre Ganne and I."[79] De Lubac did not back down or denounce the theological movement of which he was a leading member. He knew that his sincerity was doubted, including by Pope Pius XII, who (according to de Lubac's friend Cardinal Gerlier) said in 1950, "What is annoying about him is that one never knows if what he says or writes corresponds to what he thinks."[80] This charge of craftiness is present in *Humani Generis*, although de Lubac is not named.

77. De Lubac, 243–44.

78. See Henri de Lubac, SJ, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 64. Interestingly, de Lubac protests against the title *The Splendor of the Church*: "The English translation dressed it up with the pompous title 'The Splendour of the Church,' which seems to rank it among the 'triumphalist' writings and thereby to accelerate its obsolescence. It is no more a treatise on the Church than was *Catholicisme*" (77).

79. De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 68.

80. De Lubac, 68.

Was de Lubac receptive to Mother Church, as given voice by the encyclical of Pius XII? On the one hand, as noted above, he did not think that any doctrine the encyclical defended was one that, strictly speaking, he denied.[81] On the other hand, he did not renounce his theological perspectives—which certainly were close to the ones the encyclical deemed dangerous—and strive to become a neo-scholastic along the lines promoted by the encyclical. In 1953 and 1954, he published two editions of *Méditation sur l'Église* despite the fact that at this time he was generally banned from publishing on theology. In his later memoir, de Lubac recounts that his effort to publish *Méditation sur l'Église* was "strangely crowned with success," given that Rome approved it at the same time (1952) that Rome was rejecting permission for him to publish various other things.[82] The essays had all been written by 1949, but de Lubac augmented them with "several new pages," along with (in the second edition, published very quickly after the first edition) the bold preface from which I have quoted.[83] De Lubac explains in his memoir that *Méditation sur l'Église* got through the Roman censors largely by chance, due to the absence of the censor normally in charge. Indeed, the 1954 Italian translation was denied an imprimatur by the Vicariate of Rome, but the Italian edition nevertheless ended up appearing in print due to the patronage of Milan's Archbishop Giovanni Montini (the future Pope Paul VI).

How to square the above with *Méditation sur l'Église*'s remarks about receptivity to the authority of the present-day Magisterium? To my mind, the answer is simple, and I have already adumbrated most of it above. Marian receptivity to Mother Church means listening reverently to the teachings of the present-day Magisterium and not trying to evade their binding doctrinal and moral content. But such receptivity does not mean agreeing with the present pope's judgments in

81. See de Lubac, 71.
82. De Lubac, 74.
83. De Lubac, 75.

respect to every matter. Pope Pius XII was not friendly to the ressourcement school or to de Lubac's teachings on nature and grace and other matters, and his encyclical reflects this. But so long as de Lubac strove to listen to the Magisterium and to conform his views *if and when* they diverged from weighty Church teachings, he was not evading the Magisterium of Pius XII when he maintained his significant differences and even anticipated that future popes might think differently in matters that are not resolved.

In his memoir *At the Service of the Church*, de Lubac rejects the view that "one is less free to the degree that one is more respectful of the Magisterium."[84] All magisterial teachings must be attended to with reverence, but not everything has the weight of an authoritative teaching of faith and morality.[85]

I should add that my perspective does not require that de Lubac be absolutely consistent or always in the right. To take positions that cut against the grain of reversible magisterial teaching, even if one believes that one's positions do not strictly fall under an encyclical's condemnations or can be justified in other ways, is a risk. De Lubac claims in his memoir that he both respected Pope Pius XII's Magisterium and felt free to cut against its grain, so long as he was not denying the doctrinal truths insisted upon by *Humani Generis*. Whether he succeeded in maintaining the respect for Pius XII's Magisterium that he wanted to have is an open question. I think he maintained enough respect for it, since he was never bound to agree with Pope Pius XII on everything. Had he strongly attacked (as distinct from querying or respectfully challenging) Pope Pius XII in print or dissented from the consistently taught and authoritative doctrines of the Church that the pope

84. De Lubac, 77.

85. De Lubac had commented in 1945, along lines that I find questionable (since dogmatic statements express the truth of the Gospel) but that correctly underscore that not all papal teaching is infallible: "The only 'gospel truth' is the words of the Gospel. The words of encyclicals are but encyclical words: assuredly very worthy, extremely important, but another thing" (*Paradoxes of Faith*, 53–54).

sought to defend, I think he would have violated his commitment to embody receptivity toward Mother Church and would have harmed others' ability to perceive the Church's motherhood. But given the fact that he remained obedient, even while continuing to argue against the grain of Pope Pius XII's Magisterium in favor of positions held by himself and his colleagues, I think his receptivity to Mother Church, in the proper sense, was made manifest.

Indeed, differing from a pope or thinking that a pope has erred in certain ways—assuming weighty or consistently taught doctrines of faith and morality are not at stake—is not the same thing as refusing a Marian receptivity toward Mother Church's mediation of the Gospel of Christ.[86] If this were not the case, then John Henry Newman—well known for his carefully worded disagreements with Pope Pius IX's Magisterium (as well as for his more passionate and explicit private letters in this regard, even though in matters of dogmatic teaching Newman affirmed all that Pius IX taught)—could never have been a saint of the Church. As de Lubac puts the point in "Ecclesia Mater," "Whether we like it or not, there are many non-essential things that change according to time and place."[87] This fact need not get in the way of "being enlightened, guided, and shaped . . . by dogmatic truth," which is binding and cannot be reversed.[88]

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86. It should go without saying, given the above, that I disagree strongly with the thesis of Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London: Continuum, 2010). The thesis is Mettepenningen's way of attempting to appropriate de Lubac and others for the Catholic religious liberalism that de Lubac, grounding himself in Vatican II's texts and reiterating viewpoints he articulated throughout his career, sharply rejected in 1971.

87. De Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 246.

88. De Lubac, 248. I grant—as does de Lubac himself—that de Lubac did not always live up to the ideals that he set for himself, as for instance when he says of the true Catholic, "He will hold himself apart from all coteries and all intrigue, maintaining a firm resistance against those passionate reactions from which theological circles are not always free" (250). I think de Lubac demonstrably indulged occasionally in

Thus, de Lubac's commitment to receptivity to Mother Church was not just lip service. He sincerely argues in "Ecclesia Mater" that "all action that deserves to be called 'Christian' is necessarily deployed on a basis of passivity. The Spirit from whom it derives is a Spirit received from God."[89] This theocentric and Marian receptivity is the ground of Christian faith, since God gives us the gift of faith, whose ground cannot be our own rational reflection or private judgment. Submission to the Church's Magisterium nourishes this receptivity. What I have called receptivity, de Lubac with biblical and Ignatian warrant calls obedience: "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5).

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ecclesiastical intrigue and passionate reactions—but he would hardly have been human had he not done so. He goes on to say, among other things, that the true Catholic will not cherish

> utopian dreams, and he will always direct his accusations against himself first and foremost; yet he will not resign himself to Christ's disciples' settling down in the all-too-human or stagnating outside the great currents of humanity. He will see the good, be glad of it, and set himself to making it visible to others, but without blinding himself to the faults and sufferings that some try to deny while others are scandalized by them; he will not consider that loyalty or simply experience of human nature obliges him to condone every abuse. And he will, moreover, be aware that the mere passing of time wears out many things, so that many innovations are necessary if dangerous novelty is to be avoided. (254–55)

This seems to describe both de Lubac's ideal and his practice. De Lubac concludes his portrait of the theologian who is a man of the Church by stating,

> This picture of the Catholic in whom the consciousness of churchmanship is lively is, of course, altogether too meager and abstract an affair, besides being—obviously—overidealized. Here, as in all things, there is normally a big gap between the most sincere faith and the most loving disposition, on the one hand, and effective practice, on the other; for man is always inconsequential. But the important thing to take note of is not the tribute we all pay, more or less heavily, to human weakness but, rather, the nature and scope of our desires. The mystery of the Church and the good things she brings are always beyond what we manage to live of them in actual practice. We never draw upon more than a meager part of the wealth that our Mother has at her disposal. (273)

89. De Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 257.

As noted above, de Lubac did not rebel, break with the Church, or denounce the pope publicly when he was removed from teaching and when he and his close colleagues were accused of grave errors and were assigned to write on non-theological topics. As he says in *Méditation sur l'Église*, the man of the Church (or the true Catholic) must accept the "acts of the hierarchy" "as obedience demands," while "never adopting an argumentative attitude where obedience is concerned, as if there were some question of defending at all costs a threatened autonomy."[90] De Lubac rejects the very notion of entering into a contest "with those who represent God."[91] De Lubac—almost perhaps giving himself a pep talk—describes the interior attitude of a person who has been reprimanded and penalized by legitimate Catholic authority as an attitude of interior peace, assurance that the Spirit is at work, and acceptance of God's will. Nevertheless, neither does de Lubac renounce "common sense"; he does not assume that a member of the Church's hierarchy never acts obtusely or teaches erroneously.[92] The man of the Church "will make the appropriate

90. De Lubac, 260. See also the nuances found in Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Paradoxes of Faith*, trans. Paule Simon and Sadie Kreilkamp (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), from a section first published in 1945:

> To impose conditions on the exercise of authority, to justify it only as a means of pedagogy, instead of recognizing it simply as a right; to look upon it first of all as functional: does not this, they ask, slacken obedience? Not at all. For if this does occasionally counteract certain abuses of power, it also shows, above all, that a purely external submission, a mere return of everything to *order*, is not yet true obedience, but only its prerequisite. It indicates that ideal submission extends to obedience of the judgment, until the time comes when it will freely expand into the liberty of the children of God. An obedience which only recognizes orders—even if, to assure the perfect execution of those orders, it calls on the will and on the judgment—is utterly insufficient. Especially in the spiritual life, which does not consist in gestures. To fulfill the prescriptions of religious authority faithfully, strictly, without any omission, is good. But if you are satisfied with that, you have not begun to *obey*. You take for an end what is still only a means. (26–27)

91. De Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 260.
92. De Lubac, 261.

evaluation of the scope of each one of the acts of the hierarchy" and "will accept them all as obedience demands and understand them as obedience demands."[93] Obedience, yes, but not an obedience devoid of reflection.

In *Méditation sur l'Église*, without being explicit about it, de Lubac describes why he thought it appropriate to continue with the work that he and his colleagues were attempting to achieve in the Church, despite the fact that this cut against the will of Pope Pius XII, who would have liked the ressourcement movement to come to an end. De Lubac states that "as long as the order is not final, [the man of the Church] will not abandon the responsibilities with which he has been invested by his office or circumstances. He will, if it should be necessary, do all that he can to enlighten authority; that is something which is not merely a right but also a duty, the discharge of which will sometimes oblige him to heroism."[94] This statement again expresses the point that receptivity toward Mother Church does not mean pure passivity or the assumption that the representatives of the Church are correct about everything. De Lubac's point that sometimes a heroic effort to "enlighten authority" is necessary bears not only upon his situation in

93. De Lubac, 261.

94. De Lubac, 262. See also *Paradoxes of Faith*, 58, describing (in 1945) de Lubac's hopes for ressourcement:

> But how should we rediscover Christianity if not by going back to its sources, trying to recapture it in its periods of explosive vitality? How should we rediscover the meaning of so many doctrines and institutions which always tend toward dead abstraction and formalism in us, if not by trying to touch anew the creative thought that achieved them? How many explorations into distant history such a research supposes! How many painful reconstructions, themselves preceded by long preliminary work? In a word, how much 'archeology'! The task is not for everyone, obviously, but it is indispensable that it be done and forever done again. Let us not think that it is possible to reach the goal cheaply: to try that would be a kind of fraud, and when it comes to essential goods, the crook is never successful. It took forty years in the desert to enter into the Promised Land. It sometimes takes a lot of arid archeology to make the fountains of living water well forth anew.

1953 but also upon his situation in 1971, when, as we have seen, he was faced with the spread of a virulent version of Catholic religious liberalism.

More than once in *Méditation sur l'Église*, de Lubac emphasizes that God is in charge and God's legitimate representatives must be obeyed (in "conformity with the obedient Christ").[95] The man of the Church will not suppress his mind, but he will recognize that he might be wrong and he will obey when commanded. De Lubac states, "Even where he has a duty to act, and in consequence a duty to judge, he will on principle maintain a certain distrust with regard to his own judgment."[96] The true Catholic will maintain a firm awareness that his fallible actions and judgments must be grounded in receptivity to Mother Church. De Lubac remarks, "He cannot be an active member of this Body if he is not, first and foremost, a submissive member," accepting everything that the obedience of faith requires.[97] Mother Church is hierarchical, and we owe obedience to the actual hierarchs who exist now, although this does not mean that we need to think or act as though they must be correct in matters where the Magisterium has not taught with its full weight. We must love and submit to Mother Church not as an ideal but as she is, with her current pope, even when disagreements arise.[98] After all, it is Mother Church "who daily

95. De Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 263.

96. De Lubac, 264.

97. De Lubac, 264.

98. De Lubac notes that "the Catholic will not be content merely to grant and grasp that in the last analysis the Church is, so to speak, concentrated whole in Peter; the seeing of the fact will be an occasion of joy to him. He will not be worried by those who try to persuade him that he has 'lost the sense of the totality of the Church' and that in submitting himself to the power of the pope he has resigned himself to a belief that is, as it were, merely belief at the word of command" (de Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 270). De Lubac, of course, was not enthusiastic about the pontificates of Pope Pius XI and Pius XII, and so to some degree he is presenting an ideal; but he was in fact joyful that the Church is led by the successor of Peter. He goes on to explain that submission to the pope's articulation of solemn doctrine is indeed a joyful duty, and he praises papal infallibility along Newmanian (and accurate) lines.

teaches us the law of Christ, giving us his Gospel and helping us to understand its meaning."[99]

De Lubac ends "Ecclesia Mater" with a string of praises. He praises Mother Church for her doctrine, her liturgy, her consecrated religious, her traditions of spiritual life, her rejection of heresies and false paths, her fruitfulness, her bringing forth things old and new, her rejection of sectarianism, her missionary work, her catechetical labors, her witness to Christ, her sacraments, her holiness, and many other things.[100] All these praises show that de Lubac, while enduring his ecclesiastical penalty, remained committed to living and helping others to live within the trustworthy nourishment of Mother Church, rather than vociferously claiming to be the representative of Christ against the current (if in certain ways erroneous) Magisterium.

Let me return a final time to de Lubac's 1971 *The Motherhood of the Church*, written in a situation of crisis. In his analysis of the Church's motherhood in this book, he reflects upon how each individual member participates in this motherhood, so that every member exercises a (Marian) spiritual maternity. He notes that "the maternal action of the Church toward us never ceases, and it is always in her womb that this action is accomplished for us. . . . Her mission of giving birth always remains."[101] In addition to Galatians 4, de Lubac iden-

99. De Lubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 275.

100. See also the point added in de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 29: "The maternal bosom of the Church is vast enough to contain the greatest minds—and the most diverse. All can find in it the shelter necessary for all. Each according to his needs, as well, life-giving forces."

101. De Lubac, *Motherhood of the Church*, 71. De Lubac comments earlier, "Thus the image of the *Magna Mater* which dominated the Hellenistic paganism is found transposed into the Christian climate—a typical example of the boldness of Christian thought which was strong enough to seize, without contamination, everything that could serve to express it. The totality of the cosmos was included in this universal mother; everything living left her womb in order to return to it. In the same way—but with everything changed, everything renewed, everything turned inside out, 'converted'—the totality of the new cosmos is included in the Church" (54–55).

tifies another New Testament text bearing testimony to the Church as our mother: 2 John 1:1, "The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth." This "elect lady" is none other than Mother Church. To be nourished in the truth is to receive the truth of the Gospel, the truth of Scripture, from the "elect lady."

## VI. Conclusion

It remains only to briefly sum up the main lines of this essay. First, the Catholic Church is our mother. We owe reverence to our mother, and thus we owe reverence to the teaching office or Magisterium of the Church. Mother Church can be relied upon to nourish her children with the truth of Christ, both doctrinally and sacramentally. Here is where I part ways with the resistance—that is, the opposition—modeled by Richard McBrien and Bernard Häring, representative figures of the widespread postconciliar dissent from doctrines of faith and morality that have been taught consistently and in a weighty matter by the Church's Magisterium.[102] If any weighty or consistently taught doctrine is today to be reversed, it would be incumbent upon advocates of such reversal to demonstrate that this step does not undermine the entire body of dogma, including prior dogmatic teaching about the Magisterium itself. Although postconciliar dissenting theologians have tended to speak as though rupture with weighty and consistently taught doctrine would be a minor problem and has happened before (they often name slavery, religious freedom,

102. Häring tends to argue that he and other moral theologians who follow his positions are not contradicting any irreversible teaching. I disagree with him, but to make this case requires more space than I have here. For further background, see my discussion of Häring in *The Abuse of Conscience: A Century of Catholic Moral Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021); and see also Edmund Waldstein, O.Cist., "Bernhard Häring's Moral Theology," in *Faith Once for All Delivered*, 101–24. For his part, McBrien shows a willingness to reverse (if only occasionally) solemn magisterial teaching.

and usury as examples[103]), the weakness of their examples—all of which can be understood fairly easily in terms of Newmanian doctrinal development—indicates the true scope of the problem such rupture would pose.

A real rupture with weighty and consistently taught doctrine would cast into doubt the Magisterium itself and all its decisions: On what grounds do we know that the Church's present judgment is true, if the Church in a weighty and consistent manner taught the opposite until now? An arbitrary Magisterium is merely the will-to-power, no matter what claims it might make to be channeling the "Spirit." In such a situation, the Church's hierarchical structure would be threatened with collapse—an outcome, indeed, that many postconciliar dissenting theologians have explicitly wished for. If the rupture could be defended as a rupture of weighty but *reversible* teaching, then the best that could be said is that this present-day reversal is itself a likely candidate for reversal in the future, given the likelihood that the Magisterium of today (rather than the consistent Magisterium of multiple popes in the past) is in error.[104] The motherhood of the Church requires a Magisterium that holds fast to divine revelation as handed down by the Church. De Lubac believes that Christ and the Holy Spirit will

103. For discussion of these examples, see the chapter on doctrinal development in my *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014). See also Francis Oakley's argument—despite the murky status of elements of the Council of Constance, due to the Great Schism—that Vatican I reversed the Council of Constance's conciliarist decree *Haec Sancta* and that this constitutes an example of reversing an "irreversible" teaching: Oakley, "History and the Return of the Repressed in Catholic Modernity: The Dilemma Posed by Constance," in *Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity*, 29–56. Other examples, such as Pope John XXII's teaching on the beatific vision (which he recanted on his deathbed), do not entail reversal of longstanding prior magisterial teaching.

104. On this point, see my "The Church as Temple of the Holy Spirit: Is There Room for Magisterial Error?," *Communio* 50 (2023): 7–36. I will be publishing a significantly revised and expanded version of this essay in a forthcoming monograph.

sustain Mother Church in this regard, although the Church may err in some ways.

Second, believers must have a strong spiritual attitude of receptivity to Mother Church, just as de Lubac makes clear. The whole Church receives Christ in the Holy Spirit; the whole Church shares in Christ's salvific self-offering to the Father in the Eucharist. The Church is built upon Marian receptivity to Christ and his gifts, and this receptivity is at the heart of Scripture and Tradition. Ontologically, every creature stands in a fundamental relation of receptivity to God. Everything that we are and have, insofar as it is good and real, comes from God. The grace of the Holy Spirit elevates this receptivity so that we can open our minds to receive all that Christ wants us to receive. We receive Christ through the mediation of the Church built up by his Spirit. If we refuse to be open to Mother Church (and thus to the Magisterium, which itself must be bound to Marian receptivity) as the Church mediates Christ to us, then we will not be able to receive Christ's gifts. We are not in charge, and we must be truly receptive rather than only accepting what we deem fit.[105]

Third, we can distinguish the hierarchical representatives of Mother Church communicating doctrinal and moral truth in a weighty, consistent, and solemn way from cases where the Magisterium puts forward non-definitive teaching, as for instance (to refer again to de Lubac) about what can be said speculatively about the human desire for beatitude given that grace and nature are distinct.[106] We owe the assent of faith to

105. For further discussion, see my "What God qua God Must Do: Providence, Predestination, and the Limits of *Sacra Doctrina*," in *Love Become Incarnate: Essays in Honor of Bruce D. Marshall*, ed. Justus H. Hunter, T. Adam Van Wart, and David L. Whidden III (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023), 193–213.

106. For further discussion of the distinction between non-definitive and definitive teaching (with respect to the ordinary magisterium), see my essay on "The Church as Temple of the Spirit"; and see Avery Dulles, "The Magisterium and Theological Dissent," in *The Craft of Theology*, expanded ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 105–18; Dulles, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Naples, FL: Sapientia,

all magisterial teaching that is presented to us solemnly as the faith of Mother Church. Not all magisterial teaching is at this level. But, as de Lubac notes, we owe respect to all magisterial teaching; we must listen to it in a spirit of openness and receive it reverently.

As the example of de Lubac suggests (and as the life of John Henry Newman shows as well), there may be times when it is our duty to cut against the grain of the present-day Magisterium, even to the point of significant resistance. In such cases, public denunciation, as distinct from rhetorically cautious raising of concerns, is not the right path for theologians, since this would tend to undermine believers' appreciation for the Church's motherhood and impair virtuous Marian receptivity in oneself and others, paving the way for the reign of private judgment. But when dealing with what is quite likely a non-definitive teaching, especially if such teaching rejects or pastorally undermines weighty and consistent prior Catholic teaching, theologians have a duty to Mother Church to raise concerns in light of the sources of faith, Scripture and Tradition. Theologians may be required to publish works that call into serious question some aspects of the teaching or outlook of the contemporary Magisterium, as de Lubac did. In so doing,

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2007), chapter 7. See also Edward Feser, "Magisterium: The Teaching Authority of the Church," in *The Faith Once and for All Delivered*, 149–70, which rightly emphasizes "how far the Church is from holding that the non-irreformable statements of a pope are immune from legitimate criticism" (169). Feser is indebted to Dulles's writings. As Dulles points out, "The problem of dissent within the Church was acutely raised when Vatican II seemed to modify, and even perhaps to reverse, previous papal teaching on several subjects such as biblical inerrancy, the ecumenical movement, religious freedom, and criteria for membership in the Church" ("Magisterium and Theological Dissent," 112). Dissent became widespread after the Council, and of course, the Church over the centuries has undergone convulsions of dissent, as for instance, the Reformation. Dulles recommends that the Magisterium should "avoid issuing too many statements, especially statements that appear to carry with them an obligation to assent" (116–17)—but this is easier said than done, especially in a cultural context that regularly calls into question basic Christian norms and practices and that also challenges Christians to do more (e.g., on the environment and on social justice).

theologians' attitude must remain receptive and Marian, configured to Christ's truth and willing to suffer ecclesiastical penalty obediently, refusing to enter into "opposition."

If we ever find ourselves in a time where resistance to the Magisterium's present non-definitive teaching is required precisely in order to love Mother Church, let us, like de Lubac, "turn to God, acknowledging our dependence on Him and giving thanks"[107]—especially for Mother Church and the Magisterium of the reigning pontiff, even when one has significant disagreements. The alternative attitude would be unthinkable for the Catholic, who cannot proceed by "forging alliances of hate" against the pastors of Mother Church.[108] As Paul instructs his Philippian congregation during the difficult years of his imprisonment, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . . Whatever is true, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, . . . if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4:6–8). One such thing is the Marian motherhood of the Church.

107. Alan Noble, *On Getting Out of Bed: The Burden and Gift of Living* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2023), 101.

108. Tom Hiney, "The New Agnosticism," *First Things* no. 338 (December 2023): 17–22, at 21. The example that dominates Hiney's essay is Padre Pio, who was persecuted by the Church for much of his life. The point is that as Christians we must resist "in a different way, Christ's way, and he was a Holy Victim, as were the saints who followed him, relentless critics of 'crooked generations' all of them" (21).