

## Marian Studies

---

Volume 3

Article 9

---

2-13-1952

### The Place of Our Lady in the Mystical Body

Cyril Vollert

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)

 Part of the Catholic Studies Commons, Christianity Commons, and the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

---

#### Recommended Citation

Vollert, Cyril (1952) "The Place of Our Lady in the Mystical Body," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 3, Article 9.  
Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol3/iss1/9](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol3/iss1/9)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu), [ecommons@udayton.edu](mailto:ecommons@udayton.edu).

## THE PLACE OF OUR LADY IN THE MYSTICAL BODY

The devotion which many Catholics have to the Blessed Virgin remains on a sub-theological level. They perceive that their spiritual life requires filial love of the Mother of God, who is also their Mother. But their theological knowledge is likely to be unequal to their personal piety and apostolic activity. They rightly set Mary on a pedestal and fondly regard her as the ideal of purity, humility, and union with God. They are also aware that her matchless prerogatives flow from her divine maternity. But what is sensed confusedly by all Christians ought to be brought out clearly by theologians. If Mary is to occupy in Catholic life the eminent place that is her due and if Catholics are to accord that place to her with all their hearts, she must be situated in the rich doctrine of the mystical body of Christ. That devotedness to the Blessed Virgin may be something more than personal piety, that it may be a powerful drive in our lives of militant Catholic Action, we must aspire to a keener perception of the absolutely unique position she has in the Church. By stressing the social aspect of Mary's eminence, we shall appreciate more adequately her importance in Catholic dogma and theology, and consequently we shall discern more distinctly the place she ought to have in our spiritual life and our apostolate: hers is the first place after that of her Son.

### *I. Mother of the Mystical Body and of the World*

The supernatural order is not an imitation of the natural order; on the contrary, the natural order is fashioned on the model of the supernatural order. "The order of nature was created and established for the order of grace. . . . The order of grace, the heights of which are occupied by Christ and the Blessed Virgin, is the idea and exemplar according to which



God created and arranged the order of nature and of the whole universe.”<sup>1</sup> It is because the natural order is an image of the supernatural order that we can gain some understanding, by the natural things we see, of the existence, character, or propriety of the supernatural things we do not see. Natural life is an image of supernatural life that is incomparably more excellent. The qualities of father, mother, husband, wife which we observe in the natural order are images of titles, properties, and qualities, all analogous but vastly superior, found in the supernatural order. In this supernatural order God is our Father who begets us to supernatural life, and we are His children; Jesus Christ is the Spouse of our souls, and our souls are His spouses; He is also our Brother, and we are brothers and sisters to Him. All this is said in a true sense. Accordingly we ought to have, in a sense that is likewise true, a mother in the supernatural order. And this mother of ours, for our life of grace, is the Blessed Virgin.

Indeed, Mary is our mother more excellently and perfectly than our mothers in the natural order are. Supernatural life is what the Church has in mind when it invites all nations to rejoice in the life that is conferred on them by the Blessed Virgin: “Vitam datam per Virginem, gentes redemptae plaudite.”<sup>2</sup> This supernatural life is true life, and is more perfect than natural life, for it is a participation in God’s life, which is life par excellence. From this point of view natural life, which is assuredly real life, is an imitation of supernatural life. Nature is for the supernatural; the things that make up the natural order are images of those of the supernatural order, and serve to acquaint us with that order so far as we can grasp it during the present time of faith. Supernatural and divine things are always above natural and human things,

<sup>1</sup> Cornelius a Lapide, S.J., *Commentarium in Ecclesiasticum*, in *Commentaria in Scripturam sacram*, Parisiis, 1859, vol. 9, cap. 24, p. 618.

<sup>2</sup> Hymn for Lauds, *Officium Sanctae Mariae in Sabbato*.

for they are closer to God and therefore share more abundantly of God Who is being and truth in essence. "The closer a thing is to its principle in any genus, the greater the share it has in the effect of that principle."<sup>3</sup>

By the grace of God we have been taken up supernaturally into God's family. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our souls divine life floods us, Christ is our Brother, and the heavenly Father is our Father. In this family there is also a mother; she is the Mother of the only-begotten Son of God and is likewise the Mother of all who have Christ for a Brother. Mary is the Mother of the Whole Christ, head and members. The fact that we owe human existence to a human mother is not compromised. But in the supernatural order our nature is not an independent entity. As all reality reaches its climax in Christ, the head of mankind, so all motherhood reaches its climax in the motherhood of God's Mother. Human motherhood is not thereby less precious, but on the contrary has its ultimate meaning and value from the idea of motherhood in the supernatural economy. Furthermore, if Mary is the Mother of the mystical body, she is also the Mother of all men, because all men are for the mystical body. In that case she is situated at the center of the history of salvation, and therefore at the center of universal history. And that is the first truth we ought to grasp about the place of Our Lady in the mystical body.

## II. *Scriptural Analogies of Union with Christ*

God has raised to the supernatural order not individual men but the human race. This truth commands the doctrines of original sin and redemption. Yet the social character of our supernatural elevation does not involve the slighting of the individual person; still less does it imply that individual

<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa*, III, q. 27, a. 5.



persons are only means for achieving a social end. Rather, individual persons are regarded in the eternal plan as parts of a whole. In Scriptural parlance, each person is envisaged by God as a stone in an edifice, a cell in an organism, a member of the body of Christ. But if the members of Christ's body compose with Him an organic whole, the human being who is indispensably and personally necessary for the existence and career of the Incarnate Word, Mary the Mother of God, must straightway take her station next to the head, in the first place, with a role that is shared with no other. She is God's masterpiece, and in His eternal thought He lovingly contemplates her as the one creature who has perfectly carried out His designs.

That is what Mary is for God; what is she for us? In our egoism we tend to cherish an individualist point of view, to see Mary as the mediatrix who, after her Son, is concerned in her motherly way about our personal welfare. Such a view is not wrong, for the mystical body of Christ is an organism made up of persons, each of whom is beyond price and has personal relations with God. But it is an inadequate representation of Mary's activity in our sanctification. Mary cannot wish to sanctify us otherwise than Christ does, and Christ wishes His mystical body to develop harmoniously. Our Lady's maternity of grace is not exercised first on individuals, and then only by way of consequence or afterthought on the body; it is exercised on the body and the members simultaneously, and on the members as integrating the body. Whatever comes to us in the economy of salvation comes to us socially; grace is given to us not as isolated individuals, but as members of Christ's body. We grow in supernatural life by growing in union with Christ; the grace we receive is the grace of Christ our head, flowing over us. Mary is the new Eve, whose activity on our behalf has to correspond to that of the new Adam. Our natural life comes to us ultimately from



Adam and Eve; our supernatural life comes to us from Jesus through Mary. The Mother of Christ is the Mother of each of Christ's members because she is the Mother of the Whole Christ.

This is still a somewhat general way of setting forth Mary's activity in our sanctification. To make it more specific, we may turn to the comparisons and analogies which revelation suggests to us. Since grace is given to us as members of the mystical body, can we not enhance our knowledge about Mary's position in the mystical body by considering the various details we are taught about that supernatural organism? In proceeding thus, to be sure, we immediately encounter the difficulty which characterizes all theological investigation, that is, the fact that supernatural mysteries exceed the powers of our dim human minds. However, since nature is an image of the supernatural, a study of the metaphors, figures, and analogies we are able to gather from Sacred Scripture will convey to us some insight into the divine truths God has revealed. In this way, by exploiting inspired analogies, we can hope to gain a glimpse of the treasures contained in God's message to us. That is what St. Paul and St. John have taught us with regard to the mystery of our incorporation into Christ. The Church is represented as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and our souls, too, are in turn temples fashioned to the likeness of the first temple. The Church is also the field in which the good seed has been sown, and the vine of which Christ is the trunk. It is also the ideal spouse acquired by Christ and purified by His blood. It is also an immense body whose soul is the Holy Spirit. All these images are informative and suggestive; and although they are undoubtedly deficient, they complement and mutually correct one another, thus enabling us to enter more deeply into a reality which, because it is divine, passes beyond our human processes of thinking.

III. *Mary's Place in the Mystical Body*  
*Sought Through These Analogies*

1. *Comparison of the Temple*

You are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of the family of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the CORNER FOUNDATION - STONE being Christ Jesus Himself. In Him the whole building, accurately fitted together, rises into a holy temple in the Lord; in Him you also are being built together into a spiritual dwelling-place of God.<sup>4</sup>

The comparison of the building erected on the cornerstone that is Christ teaches us that the Church is not a formless entity but that it has a well-defined structure and is so stable as to defy time. In this temple of God Christ is the foundation cornerstone and the faithful are the living stones which, resting on Him, constitute the superstructure of the building.

What place belongs to the Blessed Virgin in this marvelous edifice? The building rests on the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the foundation cornerstone that sustains the whole temple. Is Mary excluded from the function of the chief cornerstone and relegated to the role of ordinary stones, represented by the simple faithful? Such an interpretation is intolerable. St. Paul's mention of prophets and apostles stresses the hierarchic order in the Church, with reference to the preaching of the faith and the spreading of the reign of Christ. He had no reason to speak of Mary, whose function is quite different. Our Lady is indeed a stone in this mighty building, but a unique one. She is not the cornerstone in the same sense as Christ: "Other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid: which is Christ Jesus."<sup>5</sup> Yet she is, after

<sup>4</sup> *Eph. 2: 19-22* (Spencer's translation).

<sup>5</sup> *I Cor. 3: 11.*



Christ, the main stone that gives consistency to the edifice; not only did she, as Christ's Mother, furnish this stone which is the foundation of the structure, but as universal mediatress she lends vigor, solidity, and stability to the great temple of the Church. Thus the Blessed Virgin is the first stone laid after the cornerstone, that on which rests the whole edifice of our salvation, that which transmits to Christ, foundation on which everything has to be built, the immense pressure of the living temple.<sup>6</sup> Although Mary has no jurisdictional authority, she acts with true supremacy in directing men to their destiny. The temple of Christ is still in process of construction: "in Him you also are being built together." Since each of these living stones must fit into the structure, they have to be shaped, smoothed, polished. And that is the work of Mary, whose motherly activity fashions in souls the dispositions needed to fit them into Christ.

## **2. Comparison of the Cultivated Field**

You are a field of God's tilling, a structure of God's design.<sup>7</sup>

A like process may be discerned in the figure of the cultivated field, an analogy that brings out the activity of grace and stresses the unity produced in the mystical body by the cause which operates in the interior and communicates life. St. Paul rounds out his beautiful allegory by associating the image of the field with that of the building under construction. Many activities in this work of spiritual cultivation co-operate toward the end sought by God: the labor of preachers who sow the seed, the cares of God's servants who tend its growth, the higher causality of Christ, the vital cours-

<sup>6</sup> Cf. H. Rondet, S.J., *De la place de la Très Sainte Vierge dans l'Eglise corps mystique du Christ*, in *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Études Mariales*, 1937, p. 216.

<sup>7</sup> I Cor. 3: 9.



ing of the inner sap, and at the summit the action of God Who gives life and growth to the seed planted in the field of the Church. A wide region here opens up for Our Lady's motherly activity. Working along with Christ, the divine Gardener, Who makes the garden of the Church fertile with His blood, Mary the universal mediatrix has her indispensable part in causing a bountiful crop of virtues to take root and flower healthily in our souls.

### **3. *Comparison of the Vine***

I am the vine, you the branches; he that abideth  
in Me and I in him, the same beareth much  
fruit: for without Me you can do nothing.<sup>8</sup>

When we pass from the figure of the cultivated field to that of the vine and the branches, which is the most beautiful expression Jesus Himself gave of our supernatural union with Him, we find similar reasons for application to Mary. This comparison has the advantage of impressing on us the truth that the Church does not appear suddenly on the scene in its ultimate maturity, but that it grows little by little and is still in process of becoming. If Christ is the vine on which we are the branches, Mary is the primary branch, that which unites the tendrils to the trunk, that through which all the sap must pass to carry life and develop the leaves and ripen the grapes. The apostles, too, are main branches, but under Mary; for her causality, though not hierarchical, is far superior to theirs in its universality and mode of operation. Without encroaching on Christ's unique mediation, we can say of Mary as we say of her Son, to the exclusion of every other saint: without her we can do nothing.

### **4. *Comparison of Mystical Matrimony***

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also

<sup>8</sup> *John* 15: 5.

loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it. . . . No man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, as also Christ doth the Church: because we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. . . . This is a great sacrament: but I speak in Christ and in the Church.<sup>9</sup>

We mount still higher when we express the relations between Christ and the Church by means of a comparison drawn from the union of man and woman in marriage. This image of mystic matrimony between Christ and the Church stresses the union of charity, a bond even stronger than the conjugal union of husband and wife. Christ is the divine Spouse, the Church is His bride. The analogy shows that the pre-eminence of Christ the head belongs to the spiritual and social order, and that the body of Christ is a collective personality which is the complement of the individual person of Christ. The Church is nothing without Christ; but we may also say that Christ has need of His Church, because the Church is His mystical body and the Word of God has assumed a body of flesh to find in His members the fullness of His humanity. The Church is a sort of expansion or prolongation of the person of the Incarnate Word in an organized multitude of other persons united to Him by a bond as strong as that between husband and wife. But of all these persons Mary is the first. "It is commonly said that the bride of Christ is threefold: that is, the whole universal Church militant which is called the general spouse of Christ, and each faithful and loving soul which is called the particular spouse of Christ, and finally the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, who bore Christ, is regarded as the singular spouse of Christ."<sup>10</sup> In a subordinate capacity

<sup>9</sup> *Eph.* 5: 25-32.

<sup>10</sup> Dionysius the Carthusian, *In Cantica Canticorum prooemium*, in *Opera*, vol. 7, p. 291.



Mary is associated with her Son in the work of redemption; but if we subordinate Mary to her divine Son, we immediately subordinate all the rest of mankind to her. She is the Mother of men because she is the first link between the head of the mystical body and the mystical body itself.

Since the basis of the Incarnate Word's nuptial union with the soul of His Mother is completely different from that of the rest of men, this divine marriage is higher than ours in every respect. The maternal bride of God or the bridal Mother of God, as Scheeben calls Mary,<sup>11</sup> is the chosen child of God, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the true bride of the Cantic. By reason of her unique position as Mother and bride of God she is raised above all the children of men and brought next to her divine Son, the new Eve to the new Adam.

Not only to adorn her did the God-man shower His love-gifts on Mary, from the Immaculate Conception to the Assumption. The first Eve had supported and concurred in Adam's sin; the new Eve takes her place at the side of the new Adam to rescue us from that sin. Her maternal activity is a co-operation for the work of redemption. This activity is based on her free consent; Mary is the Eve of the New Covenant, responding in the name of the entire race to God's invitation that summons us to salvation and to the divine nuptials.<sup>12</sup> And her consent was a consent to the sacrificial death of her divine Son; that is why the Catholic world, seeing the Mother of God standing under the cross, can think of her as co-offerer of the sacrifice. In her Son and through her Son she yields the fruit of her own body for the saving of the world. Her co-operation is the bride's insistence on sharing in the career of her Spouse. She stands there indomitably as the representa-

<sup>11</sup> *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1882, vol. 3, p. 491, n. 1590; and frequently elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa*, III, q. 30, a. 1: "In the name of the whole human race" Mary gave her consent for a "spiritual marriage between the Son of God and human nature."

tive of mankind that is to be redeemed, co-operating in the name of her race, that from our side too the highpriestly oblation may be a truly human offering.

### **5. *Comparison of the Body***

As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body. . . . You are the body of Christ, and members of member.<sup>13</sup>

The Church is like a human body composed of many members, organs, and cells, each having its own functions, yet all contributing to the unity of the composite that grows under the action of an identical vital principle in the same divine life, the same sanctifying grace. We learn from this comparison that the divine life comes to us socially, that we are not sanctified independently of one another, and that there is no wholesome and durable growth for the body unless each member, each organ, even each cell develops harmoniously until the body shall reach its full stature. And we are told what this stature is: it is that of Christ Himself: "Until we all attain to . . . a fully developed manhood, to the full measure of the stature of Christ."<sup>14</sup> This clarification corrects what is excessively physiological in the comparison of the vine. The growth of the mystical body is that of an organism at once visible and invisible, sensible and spiritual, that of a body made up of rational creatures who are both flesh and spirit and whose life-work and perfection consist in reproducing Christ, their model and head.

If Mary has some essential function to perform in this great organism of the mystical body whose head is Christ, she

<sup>13</sup> *I Cor.* 12: 12 f., 27.

<sup>14</sup> *Eph.* 4: 13 (Spencer).



must exercise an activity analogous to that of some supremely important organ or member of the human body. The soul of the mystical body is the Holy Spirit; its head is Christ. Which member or organ most accurately represents the maternal function exercised by the Blessed Virgin?

In the human body some members are active and dynamic, others are more passive, receiving vital impulses from other members rather than transmitting them. Some are more closely connected with the head, others are more remote from the head. Some contribute more decisively and extensively to the life and growth of the organism, others remain on a lower level, so that their operations count for little in the activity of the composite.

The supernatural organism of the mystical body exhibits a similar variety of members and diversity of vital functions. Some members are more important than others; and they are more important because they perform operations that are more valuable for the good of the whole, toward which all the members should co-operate. "As in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another; and having different gifts, according to the grace that is given us."<sup>15</sup>

In this great variety of functions the most eminent and essential are those of Christ and His Mother. As far as Christ Himself is concerned, the question is settled: God "hath made Him head over all the Church which is His body."<sup>16</sup> But Sacred Scripture gives us no such information about Mary. And Tradition is not much clearer. What, then, is the solution?

Before engaging in this discussion, we should be on our guard against ascribing to a metaphor the same doctrinal value as that contained in the clear formulas which condense the

<sup>15</sup> *Rom.* 12: 4 ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Eph.* 1: 22.

truths of our faith without the obscurity of type or figure. Otherwise we run the risk of violating metaphorical language by assigning to it doctrinal values not within its competency. In applying to the Blessed Virgin a metaphor that may characterize her mission in the supernatural order of grace, we can do no more than transfer to this order a comparison or likeness suggesting that Mary exercises functions analogous to those which the word signifies in its literal sense. Thus, when we say that Mary is the "neck" of the mystical body, we indicate that she receives from Christ the vital influence of grace to transmit it in turn to the remaining members of the Church. Likewise, if we call her the "heart" of the mystical body, we appropriate to her by analogy or similarity, in the sphere of the supernatural organism, the functions performed by the heart in the human body.

Accordingly we should reason, not from the simple metaphor, but from the doctrinal content which the metaphor epitomizes. The metaphor itself is employed to clarify and illustrate a teaching that is assumed to be demonstrated on other grounds. Such a metaphor may be very useful for imparting life and color to the substantial reality it brings to mind.

*Metaphor of the "neck."* Application of this metaphor to Our Lady goes back to the ninth century. It is common in the Middle Ages. St. Albert the Great says simply: "By the neck is understood the Blessed Virgin; so eminent is she that the whole body of the Church is united to Christ the head by her."<sup>17</sup> According to St. Bernardine of Siena, Mary "is the neck of our head, through which all spiritual gifts are communicated to His mystical body."<sup>18</sup> St. Robert Bellarmine writes: "Christ is the head of the Church, and Mary is the

<sup>17</sup> *Sermo de Assumptione*, 2, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Dom. I Quadrag.*, serm. 10, a. 1, c. 3.



neck of the Church. All gifts, all graces, all heavenly influences flow down to the body of the Church from Christ, as head, and through Mary, as neck."<sup>19</sup> Pius X recalls the metaphor of the neck in his Encyclical, *Ad diem illum*: "The source is Christ, and of His fullness we have all received. . . . Mary is the aqueduct, as Bernard aptly observes; or again, the neck which connects the head with the body and conveys to the body the power and influence of the head."<sup>20</sup>

The metaphor is consecrated by usage. It is true and exact as far as it goes. However, although it expresses the idea of Mary's mediation, in the sense of her situation between the head and members, it does not well bring out the idea of vital influence, the notion of causality by which the Blessed Virgin, in dependence on Christ, sanctifies and vivifies our souls. This figure conveys in the physiological order the function St. Bernard expresses by the metaphor of "channel" or "aqueduct" that transmits divine graces to mankind. As these images suggest, Mary exercises the office of mediation, for they imply that she is not only situated between Christ and the faithful, but that she is an instrument transmitting the riches of God to men.

Yet, if the Blessed Virgin's mediating office were restricted to the functions suggested by these figures, she would be passive, as is the neck of a channel, and would not exercise a direct life-giving influence. Her part would not be active, dynamic; she could hardly be said to exercise a truly personal influence. To this extent, the image of the "neck" seems incomplete and incapable of bringing out Mary's full activity in the mystical body. So far as it goes, it is accurate and true; but it does not convey all that Mary does as our Mother.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Concilio 42, *De Nativitate B. Mariae Virginis*, in *Opera omnia*, Neapoli, 1861, vol. 5, p. 298.

<sup>20</sup> *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 36 (1903-1904), 454.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Angel Luis, C.S.S.R., *María y el cuerpo místico*, in *Revista Española de Teología*, 3 (1943), 51.

For this reason it has encountered considerable criticism in recent studies.

According to Scheeben, "This title [neck of the mystical body] can indeed be justified and is even obvious to a superficial view; but it sounds rather crude, in some languages more so than in others."<sup>22</sup> Carl Feckes observes: "Attempts have been made to clarify Mary's organic place and activity in Christ's mystical body by the analogy of an organ in the natural body. While thinking onesidedly of . . . Mary as the channel of all graces, some have selected the neck. This image cannot be said to be beautiful."<sup>23</sup> A more severe judgment is pronounced by N. García Garcés: "This is a poor metaphor for declaring Mary's moral intervention in the distribution of graces; it is still worse for bringing out the objective co-redemption; it is worst of all for explaining the physical causality in the communication of graces which some hold, and the constant exercise of spiritual maternity."<sup>24</sup> The criticism of contemporary theologians is well summed up by A. Luis: "The main difficulty we find in this image, exclusively understood, is the static role which the neck represents in the aggregate of the body's organic functions. . . . The neck is a mere organ of transmission, like a channel or aqueduct. . . . To limit Mary's part in the supernatural organism of the mystical body to such a function seems to us to diminish and devaluate her mediatory activity, giving only a poor and languid idea of it."<sup>25</sup>

*Metaphor of the "heart."* Consequently modern authors, with surprising accord, favor the stand that Mary is the heart of the mystical body. The idea was ably championed by M. J.

<sup>22</sup> *Mariology* (translated by T. Geukers), St. Louis, 1946, vol. 1, p. 235.

<sup>23</sup> *Das Mysterium der heiligen Kirche*, ed. 3, Paderborn, 1951, p. 276.

<sup>24</sup> *Mater Corredemptrix*, Taurini, 1940, p. 290.

<sup>25</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 53, note 180.



Scheeben,<sup>26</sup> and could hardly have been better received by theologians. Today the opinion that the Blessed Virgin is the heart of the mystical body may be said to represent the mind of nearly all who discuss the relations of Our Lady with the mystical body. It is the doctrine advocated by E. Hugon, O.P.,<sup>27</sup> J. G. Arinterro,<sup>28</sup> L. Lercher, S.J.,<sup>29</sup> E. Mura,<sup>30</sup> S. Tromp, S.J.,<sup>31</sup> J. Musger,<sup>32</sup> J. McCarthy,<sup>33</sup> N. García Garcés, C.M.F.,<sup>34</sup> A. Luis, C.S.S.R.,<sup>35</sup> C. Feckes,<sup>36</sup> and many others.

In endeavoring to make a reasonable selection between

<sup>26</sup> *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1882, vol. 3, pp. 503 f., 512, 591 f.

<sup>27</sup> *La Mère de grâce*, Paris, 1904, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup> *Desenvolvimiento y vitalidad de la Iglesia*, Salamanca, 1911, p. 233; *Misión co-santificadora de María como Esposa del Espíritu Santo*, in *Crónica del Primer Congreso Mariano Montfortiano*, Barcelona, 1918, p. 275 f.

<sup>29</sup> *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae*, ed. 2, Oeniponte, 1934, vol. 1, p. 405.

<sup>30</sup> *Le corps mystique du Christ*, Paris, 1934, vol. 1, p. 182, f.

<sup>31</sup> *Corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia*, Romae, 1937, p. 23. Father Tromp, whose competency in all aspects of the mystical body is universally esteemed, states simply: "Beata Virgo est cor Ecclesiae."

<sup>32</sup> *Mariens Stellung im Organismus der Kirche*, in *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift*, 91 (1938), 528-530.

<sup>33</sup> *The Universal Mediation of the Blessed Virgin*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 52 (1938), 141. Father McCarthy expresses his mind hesitantly and as though he were proposing something original, although by 1938 the view had become a theological commonplace: "Elsewhere we have used a metaphor derived from the blood-circulation to describe the community of life, with its actions and interactions, within the organic unity of the Mystical Body. It occurs to us that, within the terms of this metaphor, Mary might also be fittingly described as the heart of the Body, for she is the great distributing center of the life which flows from the Head." In a footnote he adds: "We make this suggestion with great diffidence. We feel that we may be misunderstood. And yet the aptness of the metaphor grows upon us. The heart does not produce blood; it distributes the blood; all the blood; it is itself full of blood; it is dependent upon the brain or the head. All those statements might be translated to express the position of Mary in the Mystical Body."

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 290-293.

<sup>35</sup> *Art. cit.*, pp. 51-61.

<sup>36</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 276 ff.

these two metaphors, we should prefer the analogy that, on the one hand, better synthesizes Mary's complete dependence on Christ and, on the other, more adequately conveys the influence she exercises on all the members of the Church. No organ in the human body seems to symbolize the Blessed Virgin's position and functions in the mystical body so aptly as the heart.<sup>37</sup>

The metaphor of the heart well brings out Our Lady's place in the mystical body relative to the Holy Spirit as the soul, and Christ as the head, of this supernatural organism. As the heart is animated by the soul, Mary's person and activity are completely sustained and animated by the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit the Blessed Virgin, having conceived Christ, nourished Him, the head of the mystical body, in her womb with her maternal blood and drew Him into blood relationship with the human race. But the heart, which nourishes the head by the blood it sends throughout the whole organism, is also dependent on the head, which regulates all movement. Even in affective life the heart contracts or dilates according as objects are presented by the mind. This is an apt figure of the subordinate and dependent role represented by Mary with respect to Christ in the supernatural economy. All that Mary has she owes to Christ, source of incomparable greatness. Even her Immaculate Conception, point of departure (in the order of time) of all her privileges, is a fruit of the redemption effected by Christ; and her fullness of grace is but a participation in Christ's fullness. Thus the location of the heart under the head and the connection of the heart with the head by the nerves equipping it for its service, express Our Lady's full dependence on Christ and her subordination to Him.

The figure of the heart further indicates Mary's position

<sup>37</sup> The arguments advanced by Scheeben, Mura, and others to support this verdict have been admirably set forth by J. Musger, *loc. cit.*



relative to the rest of the members of the mystical body. A beautiful parallel emerges from the common view that the heart is the second noblest part of the body. For after Christ, the head, Mary is the most excellent member in His body. The life that courses through the whole body is strikingly manifest in her.

But the superiority of the heart over the other members rests mainly on the life-giving activity by which the heart causes the circulation of the blood and thus supplies the whole organism with constantly renewed nourishment. The vital activity of the heart is not limited to some of the body's members; it reaches them all and transmits to all the life and vigor that sustain them. Similar is the action of the Blessed Virgin relative to all the other members of the mystical body. An image of Mary's universal motherhood and mediation is easily discerned. As the body's members receive blood from the heart and are nourished by its circulation, so we receive every grace through her mediatory activity. As co-operator in the work of salvation she has received the whole merit of the redemptive sacrifice and thereby all graces of salvation for mankind. If God has enriched her with such a wealth of divine favors that no created mind can conjecture them, His purpose is that we may all receive a share in that fullness. Mary was made the Mother of God with a view to our redemption; her great mission in our economy is to transmit to all the world the treasures of grace her soul abounds in. Hence in God's redemptive program our supernatural life is no less dependent on Mary's maternal and mediatorial activity than our natural life is dependent on the functioning of the heart. And as the heart does its work whether we think of it or not, so Mary works for our salvation whether we are conscious of her co-operation and beg her intercession or, because of spiritual sluggishness or defective religious knowledge we omit recourse to her.



In this connection another parallel may be noted: as long as the heart of a sick person is sound and capable of performing its functions, we do not give up hope of that person's recovery. Similarly, when we call Mary the heart of the mystical body we exalt her intercessory power, in which we poor sinners put our unconditional and boundless trust.

The figure of the heart is likewise justified when we consider the Blessed Virgin's position in the whole of the mystical body. Like the heart in the body, Mary has a central and hidden place in the Church. Otherwise than the head, which governs man's activity and presides over his operations by issuing its orders from a position of visible command, the heart exercises its beneficent influence through the body's arteries by an invisible and hidden action. Mary, physical Mother of Christ and spiritual Mother of all the faithful, holds no office in the hierarchical, social organization of the Church. No sacrament is administered in her name, no bishop rules in the Church in virtue of a commission received from her. Her co-operation is silent, hidden; yet she has her indispensable part in the more intimate activity of the head, in the communication of life itself to the members.

But especially the heart as symbol of love brings out Our Lady's position in the mystical body. We are all aware that the brain, not the heart, is the seat of sensible affections; but that does not diminish the value of the figure. For all peoples, with the exception of some Oriental nations, regard the heart as symbol of love. And in fact, although the heart is not properly the organ of affective life, it is, in addition to being the natural symbol of love, the organ in which are felt the repercussions and are manifested the effects of love as in no other organ of the body. The father is head of the family and represents the importance of authority and justice; but the mother, as heart of the family, has the special task of being prodigal in love and of binding together the members of the



family in warm affection. Mary has a similar task in the Church; she was designed by God to be the heart of His family in her capacity as mother of all the faithful, as comforter of the afflicted and refuge of sinners.

A final advantage of the metaphor of "heart" over "neck" is the literary beauty of the image. The idea of heart vividly brings before our eyes a world of delicate love and stimulates beautiful poetic conceptions; but the idea of "neck" is mute and does not strike response in our imaginations. It can hardly be the symbol that calls forth the Blessed Virgin's mercy and sweetness, her tenderness as our Mother.<sup>38</sup>

In an exchange of comments during the "Second Week of Theology" held in Madrid, September 23, 1942, J. M. Bover suggested that Mary is neither the "neck" nor the "heart" of the mystical body, for the simple reason that she is not in the mystical body but is outside of it. She is the Mother of the Whole Christ, head and members. And the mother does not form part of the bodies of her children, but is quite distinct from them.

This objection, at first sight, seems to have some cogency. But when it is scrutinized more closely it is seen to lack foundation. For all who in any way receive influence from Christ, the head, are in some sense members of the mystical body. And theologians assert confidently that Mary is thus a member. As an example, G. M. Roschini, O.S.M., may be quoted: "The head, in its order, denotes absolute priority over all the other members, among whom is also the Mother of God. This absolute priority belongs to Christ alone, from Whom, as primary source and universal mover, all supernatural influence flows forth to all the members of His mystical body, not excluding the Blessed Virgin."<sup>39</sup> For Mary to be outside the mystical body, it would be necessary that no supernatural in-

<sup>38</sup> Cf. A. Luis, *art. cit.*, p. 61 f.

<sup>39</sup> *Mariologia*, Mediolani, 1942, vol. 3, p. 426.

fluence should flow to her from her Son. And that would in truth be an enormity in dogma.

Carl Feckes contributes to a clarification of the issue by distinguishing the several senses and therefore comprehensions of the term, Church:

This organic whole, Mary *and* the Church, is in turn called the Church. It is the Church in the fuller sense. In this concept of the Church, Mary is included as the noblest and most perfect part, the heart of the mystical body. The Church in the *fullest* sense includes Christ Himself, its head that sanctifies and vivifies the whole.<sup>40</sup>

In any case, we should not push the metaphor too far; rather, as H. Rondet reminds us, we should advance from the figure to the reality it suggests:

If we stress the fact that in the mystical body Christ is the head, we shall immediately assign to Mary the role of an essential organ: the neck, said Bernardine of Siena; the heart, repeat many modern authors, after Scheeben. Whether static [neck] or dynamic [heart], the image is but an image, and we must go beyond it.<sup>41</sup>

✓ Emile Mersch, S.J., adds that supernatural life flows through Mary into the whole body, and that "her role is not partial but total, although secondary. As the mother of God she is in her way what the God-man is in His way: both have a universal function."<sup>42</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Precious for us are the lessons disengaged from our consideration of the social aspects of Mary's motherhood of men.

<sup>40</sup> *Das Mysterium der heiligen Kirche*, p. 277.

<sup>41</sup> *De la place de la Très Sainte Vierge dans l'Eglise corps mystique du Christ*, in *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Etudes Mariales*, 1937, p. 217.

<sup>42</sup> *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (translated by C. Vollert, S.J.), St. Louis, 1951, p. 173.



Among the members of the mystical body there is an incessant circulation of life; no one can live the life of Christ without being grafted onto the mystic vine, no one can grow in grace without being a living cell or member of the body of Christ. The more vigorous each one's supernatural life is, the more will life develop throughout the entire organism. But the very perfection of this life requires a perfect docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, the docility of Mary herself. The same docility must prevail on the level of Catholic Action. To be effective, Catholic Action must be soundly organized, and it cannot be soundly organized without fidelity to the hierarchy, such as Mary had with regard to Jesus and later toward His apostles.<sup>43</sup>

A truth we may never forget is that the Mother of God was not merely associated with the beginning of the human life of the Redeemer, but that she shared in His whole career and office, and still continues to do so. She was adorned with so many astounding graces and privileges not only on account of her exalted dignity, but because she has an essential place in the saving work of conferring grace. Unless we perceive this, we remain far short of the full truth and do not rise to the heights of Catholic Mariology. Mary, Mother of the Whole Christ, must influence every phase of our Catholic life. The common motherhood of the Blessed Virgin involves a new relation toward men, to which on the side of men a definite religious attitude toward her corresponds, differing from every other. Mary is the Mother, we are her children. We have such a relation toward no other saint. And that is the conviction of the Catholic people: Mary is active with a mother's love on behalf of her children. Therefore we must entrust our lives to her; and as for our eternal salvation, to whom shall we turn if not to our heavenly Mother?

For our Mother is now in heaven; Mary first of all, in

<sup>43</sup> Cf. H. Rondet, S.J., *art. cit.*, p. 223.

right if not in fact, has after Jesus entered into glory. Still acting in the Church, she is now reunited to her divine Son, holding after Him the first place, exercising after Him the first role. The Assumption corresponds to the Ascension, the new Eve is eternally at the side of the new Adam. By the mere fact of her presence in heaven, our Mother draws us there; as the head needs His members, the Mother requires her children. She is still our all-powerful Mother, and we are still in her womb, where we will remain until Christ is fully formed in us. We are all there, saints or sinners, for in all of us our Mother sees Christ.

REV. DR. CYRIL VOLLERT, S.J.,  
St. Mary's College,  
St. Marys, Kansas.