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# JESUS' MOTHER "TREASURED ALL THESE WORDS . . . IN HER HEART" (LUKE 2:19)

ON USING A SPIRIT HERMENEUTIC TO  
REFLECT TOGETHER ABOUT MARY<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

A major issue over which many Evangelicals and Pentecostals differ from Roman Catholics is the status of Mary, Jesus' mother. Evangelicals critique some of the Marian dogmas and practices as excesses that challenge Christ's sole mediation and eclipse the Spirit, while Catholics warn that neglect of Mary potentially leads to failure to acknowledge Christ's full humanity and divinity. This is a proposal to place Spirit hermeneutics into ecumenical service to bridge the gap between the Catholic and Evangelical Marys. The Spirit hermeneutics proposed here is built on Amos Yong's (and other Pentecostal scholars') Word-Spirit-Community epistemology, Catholic philosopher Bernard Lonergan's call to broadened horizons and openness to radical conversion, and Mary's own pneumatic hermeneutic by which she prioritizes listening to the Spirit-inspired words spoken into

her life, treasuring those words in her heart, and pondering them and the often bewildering events of her life and that of her Son.

## Introduction

In the ecumenical enterprise undertaken by Catholics and Evangelicals since the Second Vatican Council, a major stumbling block continues, sadly, to be the differing degrees of honor granted to Mary, the mother of our Lord, by these communities of faith. Pondering the obstacles that “beset even the most sincere desire” to achieve Christian unity, Yves Congar once predicted that even after a degree of agreement had been achieved regarding justification—historically the quintessential bone of contention between Catholics and Protestants—there would still be “the insuperable wall of ... devotion to the Virgin Mary.”<sup>2</sup> This wall may be summarized in terms of Evangelicals’ and Catholics’ major critiques of each other’s stance toward Mary. Evangelicals critique Catholic Marian teachings and practices as excesses that challenge Christ’s sole mediation and eclipse the Spirit, while Catholics critique Evangelical neglect of Mary as leading potentially to failure to acknowledge Christ’s full humanity and divinity as well as to dishonor the one who said, “from now on all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). The focus here, though, is not to analyze this wall or gap between these widely divergent understandings of Mary but rather to consider a path by which that gap might be overcome.

I propose that Evangelicals and Catholics, indeed, all who yearn to bridge this Marian gap, consider a Spirit hermeneutic as potentially a fruitful way to find a measure of consensus about Mary. To share such a hermeneutic would be in itself a step toward achieving consensus since it is the hermeneutic that Mary herself used.

The Spirit hermeneutic I propose is similar to that articulated by Pentecostal scholars in recent years, but one that is enhanced by the method proposed by Bernard Lonergan, a Jesuit Thomist who has explicated at considerable length the progressive nature of human understanding. He suggests that accommodating this progressive nature of human cognition in doing constructive theology (or virtually any kind of creative thinking) can eventually culminate in a conversion of love

that enables persons to grasp, assess, and, if judged fitting, appropriate another's viewpoint, provided that, in their diligent pursuit of truth, they have first been willing to probe and assess their own perspective and to act accordingly. Essential to the adoption of such a hermeneutic is an ecumenical mentality, a disposition toward wholeheartedly desiring and actively seeking unity of heart and thought while diligently avoiding compromise of truth and faith.<sup>3</sup>

## A Pentecostal Epistemology

Foundational to a Spirit hermeneutic is a Pentecostal epistemology. Amos Yong names the sources of knowledge on which such a hermeneutic is built as Spirit-Word-Community. Similarly, Kenneth Archer refers to them as Spirit-Scripture-Community, while Roger Stronstad speaks in terms of Spirit-Scripture-Theology.<sup>4</sup> In Yong's triadic epistemology, Spirit indicates relationality, Word rationality, and Community dynamism. His hermeneutic is a trialectic involving the "continuous interplay of Spirit, Word, and Community." Against prioritizing one source over another, Yong proposes a matrix of overlapping and interconnecting negotiations of meaning to arrive at a trialogical reimagination, or reinterpretation, of the encounter of God with self in the world. For Yong, this reinterpretation is not absolute but rather provisional, i.e., "corrigible, fallibilistic, and open to further inquiry."<sup>5</sup>

The task of constructing an ecumenical understanding of Mary requires a theological epistemology and hermeneutic such as Yong's as well as a method such as Lonergan's. It cannot be limited solely to what is written explicitly in Scripture (Word), for to do so would be to truncate what God says, just as Mary herself could not have heard the angel's words for what they were—a word from God—had she confined her epistemology solely to the Scriptures of Israel (Luke 1:30–33, 35–37). People of the Spirit must listen to the voice of the Spirit whenever, wherever, and however the Spirit speaks. Contra *sola scriptura* or reason alone or historicism alone, a Spirit hermeneutic seeks to interpret the experience of the people of God in every age through the illumination of the same Spirit who inspired the written Word and who continues to inspire its proper interpretation today.

In a Spirit hermeneutic, the three epistemological sources do not act independently but rather interdependently by the Spirit: (1) The Spirit interprets the Scripture, relating it to the tradition of the community of faith and to personal experience. (2) The Spirit interprets personal experience, relating it to the Scripture and to the tradition of the community. And (3) the Spirit interprets the tradition of the community of faith in the light of Scripture and of personal experience. The same Spirit who empowers persons and communities of diverse traditions to seek mutual understanding and theological consensus binds them together in their search for truth through the love of God that they share.

Perhaps the hermeneutic described here seems to prioritize the Spirit over the Word or give undue weight to personal experience or to tradition (which I define here, deliberately redundantly, as the communal memory of the common experience of a community of faith). In fact, I do prioritize the Spirit in the interpretative process because so often the role of the Holy Spirit is downplayed or overlooked. I also understand both experience and tradition in pneumatological terms. The Spirit mediates the believer's experience with God through Word and sacrament and in everyday encounters with nature, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and, indeed, all of God's children. Evangelicals and Pentecostals, though they have not historically called their shared memories or common experiences tradition, now recognize them as such, the point being that Catholics and Orthodox need to acknowledge the tradition of Pentecostals and Evangelicals even as Pentecostals and Evangelicals need to recognize the activity of the Spirit in the older traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Tradition itself is mediated by the Spirit. In fidelity to the principle of *sola scriptura*, Protestants have historically tended to think of tradition as primarily human invention or "innovation," but, more and more, Evangelicals are recognizing that tradition, like Scripture, is pneumatic. Although human persons are instrumental in its expression and transmission, it is the Holy Spirit who continues to speak to the people of God in and through it. In this sense, the Bible itself is the written, inspired tradition of Jewish and Christian experience. James Shelton speaks of tradition as "the Holy Spirit speaking to the church

through the church for the last two thousand years.”<sup>7</sup> The Orthodox also understand tradition in this pneumatological sense.<sup>8</sup>

## Mary’s Pneumatic Hermeneutic

The hermeneutic I propose might also be called a “Marian hermeneutic,”<sup>9</sup> in that Mary herself used it: “But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19; cf. 2:51).<sup>10</sup> The main verb is “treasured” (*suntēreō*, to preserve together), the participle being “pondered” (*sumballō*, to guard together), the locus of the activity being the heart (indicating a holistic rather than a merely intellectual exercise), and the object being the “sayings” (*rhēmata*), including the Annunciation and subsequent events. Even though Mary does not always understand, she treasures all the events and ponders them in her heart.

Mary’s hermeneutic can be understood in terms of Lonergan’s cognitive model of a thinking, choosing person, the four levels of consciousness in such a person being experience, understanding, judging, and decision.<sup>11</sup> In Mary’s case, as she struggles to understand the unique, revelatory experiences that she undergoes, there is a constant internal dialogue as she mulls them over, arranging and rearranging them in her mind, trying to grasp their significance, then evaluating them in terms of what they demand, how she should act in response to them. Finally, there is the decision stage when, after understanding and judging, the person decides to act, as Mary did when she said, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). According to Lonergan, it is in such decision-making that a person arrives at a level of self-transcendence and achieves authenticity. I see Mary as modeling this kind of theological thinking and living.

Further, in Mary’s view, as in the gospel writers’, to grasp the significance of the events that happened to her, they had to be interpreted in light of the Scriptures, which in her time were the Hebrew Scriptures (consider, for example, her dependence on the Psalms in the *Magnificat*). This is the same approach the post-resurrection Christ used when expounding the Scriptures to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and later to the apostles in the Upper Room (Luke 24:27, 44–46). Therefore, I am proposing that Catholics and Evangelicals look at Mary through

the same lens that she, Jesus, and the gospel writers used: the Hebrew Scriptures. This was, in fact, until the Enlightenment, essentially the same way the church itself has historically interpreted the Scriptures. So, in addition to looking at the key narratives in the Christian Scriptures about Mary, in this endeavor to reflect together about Mary, I call upon Catholics and Evangelicals to be sensitive not only to the insights of historical criticism but also to the types in the Hebrew Scriptures that illuminate Mary, since only as we consider her in light of her Son who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:17–18) are we able to interpret her properly.

This Marian hermeneutic has an epistemology that corresponds closely with that of Amos Yong and other Pentecostal scholars: experiential/pneumatic (Spirit), scriptural/rational (Word), and traditional/communal (Community). If the Church is indeed the community of faith through which we today can hear what the Spirit has been saying for the last two millennia, then its tradition has an epistemological value that cannot be ignored without quenching the Spirit. If we, as an ecumenical family, seek to achieve a fuller mutual understanding of Mary, then we need to listen to what the Spirit has led the Church to understand about Mary rather than clinging solely to the letter of the Scriptures. As demonstrated in my dissertation, there has been a 2,000-year-old tradition of linking Mary to the Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Mary's hermeneutic is pneumatic as she relies not so much on her own intellect as on the illumination of the Holy Spirit, constantly seeking to learn from the words and deeds of others and from the events as they unfold, all the while remaining humble, admitting when she does not understand, yet always seeking to understand. That is why, on the one hand, she accepts by faith Gabriel's pronouncement as divine revelation, as the very oracles of God, while, on the other, she ponders and probes. In pneumatological terms, she hears the angelic words as the voice of God's Spirit in her heart, interpreting this revelation in light of the Scriptures of Israel and the tradition of the Jewish community of faith to which she belongs.

Intrinsic to this hermeneutic, whether consciously recognized or not, is the profound effect that the tradition in which the faith of the hermeneut has been cultivated has on the interpretation. For most Pentecostals, it is the Evangelical as well as the Pentecostal tradition that

typically influences their interpretation. For charismatics, that is, those in the renewal of the various mainline denominations, the tradition varies according to the particular church or community of faith with which they are affiliated. In Mary's case, it is her Jewish understanding of the promised Messiah that forms the basis of her initial interpretation of who her Son is and what his messianic mission will be. Gabriel himself refers to this tradition in recalling God's promise of a king of the house of David whose reign will have no end (Luke 1:32–33; 2 Sam 7:12–13, 16; Ps 89:4; 132:11; Isa 9:6–7; 16:5). However, since it soon becomes evident that her Son's kingship will not be the kind that the Jews had historically envisioned—"my kingdom is not of this world," as Jesus eventually explains (John 18:36)—Mary learns to rely increasingly on the voice of the Spirit as she hears it through the words of her Son and in her own heart as she ponders these things. In time, by observing the direction in which the Spirit is directing her Son's life, Mary slowly begins to glimpse the true nature of Jesus' kingship. It is neither Scripture alone nor the tradition of the Jewish community alone, nor is it her personal experience alone that informs Mary. Her own powers of reasoning and understanding are inadequate for the task, as Luke repeatedly makes clear. Rather it is by illumination of the Spirit upon and through her experience in light of Scripture, tradition, and reason as it aligns with that unpredictable "new thing" (Isa 43:19) that the Spirit is always doing that Mary eventually realizes the true meaning of her Son's mission and her own calling within that mission.

## **Lonergan's Widening Horizons and Conversion**

Mary's experience demonstrates Lonergan's point that an authentic hermeneutic must take into account the gradually unfolding nature of human understanding. Understanding, or reason, is one aspect of the hermeneutical process that, though sometimes not explicitly stated, is integral to the interpretative task.

## **Progressive Nature of Human Understanding**

The progressive nature of human understanding of divine revelation is related to what Henry Newman called the development of doctrine.<sup>13</sup>

It is Lonergan's underlying point in his *Insight*.<sup>14</sup> The first step toward authentic understanding is the "personal appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness."<sup>15</sup> Once that has been achieved, the search for truth takes place through a series of questions and insights. Whenever an insight is gained, it is then examined for authenticity; once the insight is judged authentic, the hermeneut then has the task of rethinking her position based on the new insight, which then, in turn, brings up still more questions. Lonergan's emphasis is that the quest for truth, for a correct interpretation not only of Scripture but of the events throughout history and in our own life and times, involves continuous adjustments to our thinking as new insights bring the truth into ever clearer, sharper focus. As our horizons widen, so does our understanding.

## **Dialectical Ecumenism**

Lonergan's concept of ever expanding horizons in *Method in Theology* enables us to conceptualize what must happen for those in different traditions to come to a place that they can begin to understand each other's viewpoints regarding Mary or any other point of disagreement. Lonergan speaks of this process as a dialectic, "a generalized apologetic conducted in an ecumenical spirit, aiming ultimately at a comprehensive viewpoint, and proceeding towards that goal by acknowledging differences, seeking their grounds real and apparent, and eliminating superfluous oppositions."<sup>16</sup> Such is the aim of any true ecumenical effort.<sup>17</sup>

Also helpful here is Reformed theologian Heiko Oberman's point that as a part of the task of broadening horizons, theologians need to hold themselves accountable to the "brethren," the community of believers, not limiting "brethren" to the members of their own ecclesial affiliation but rather extending it to "all baptized Christians and baptizing communities, the Christian Churches."<sup>18</sup> Like Lonergan, Oberman is essentially calling for a conversion of the heart toward our separated brothers and sisters,<sup>19</sup> to include rather than exclude one another.

## **Radical Conversion**

For Lonergan, dialectic suggests the possibility not only of a progression of thought, development in doctrine, or widening of horizon,

but a total transformation involving a radical “change in course and direction . . . as if one’s eyes were opened and one’s former world faded and fell away.” From such a transformation, Lonergan says, “emerges something new that fructifies in inter-locking, cumulative sequences of developments on all levels and in all departments of human living.” The radical type of conversion that Lonergan envisions is one that “affects all of a man’s conscious and intentional operations . . . [that] directs his gaze, pervades his imagination, releases the symbols that penetrate to the depths of his psyche . . . enriches his understanding, guides his judgments, reinforces his decisions.” This kind of conversion is requisite for ecumenists whose endeavors exceed the capacities of their initial horizons and who eventually realize that merely widening their horizons will be inadequate for the task they have undertaken. Once they come to the realization that their intellectual, moral, and/or spiritual commitments are insufficient, they must decide whether to take the leap into radical conversion.<sup>20</sup>

Such a conversion, Lonergan would insist, is not, first and foremost, a decision of the will. It is a God-given grace. Nevertheless, to appropriate that grace a person must first be open to receive it. Such a conversion involves a change of mind and, more importantly, a change of heart. Lonergan speaks of it as falling in love, specifically, falling in love with God. In the process, not only the theological task but the theologians’ entire frame of reference is revolutionized, challenging them to rethink their presuppositions and to reconsider what in the past they have summarily dismissed or simply ignored. For Lonergan, being in love with God produces such a radical conversion that there are no “limits or qualifications or conditions or reservations.”<sup>21</sup> Though such a conversion sounds rash, even dangerous, Lonergan emphasizes the importance of first making sound judgments. The implication is that we should not commit ourselves to such a radical change without first undergoing a thorough questioning and assessment process because, obviously, the point is not change for change’s sake, but change for truth’s sake and, yes, for love’s sake. To consent to undergo such a conversion can be described as similar to Mary’s unconditional yes to the word she received from the angel.

In an ecumenical quest to understand Mary, as in the Evangelicals' and Catholics' search to find a measure of consensus about Mary, such conversion may well be necessary. As theologians from the different traditions, we need, if not a total conversion, then at least a widening of our horizons, a willingness to set aside our personal preferences and preconceptions long enough to be able to comprehend each other's point of view. Only when we create space in our own minds to think, or at least imagine, the way the other thinks will we be able to achieve consensus or some measure of mutual understanding. Further, I might add, only when we ask God to enlarge our hearts to be receptive to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ will we be in a position to experience the full outpouring of God's love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) that can convert us into persons like Mary who say yes to God unconditionally and who seek his truth unreservedly, regardless of the cost.

## **Provisional Nature of the Hermeneutical Process**

Inevitably, the theological conclusions reached in a hermeneutical process will only be provisional,<sup>22</sup> though not in the sense that truth itself is provisional or variable, but only in the sense that a person's or a community's capacity for understanding or ability to articulate truth always falls short. This is the case since human intellect and language are finite and consequently incapable of fully grasping and expressing infinite truth. However, these limitations need not discourage us but rather spur us to continuously pursue an ever fuller, more accurate grasp of God's truth (Hos 6:3; John 16:13; 1 Cor 2:9–16; 13:12; 2 Cor 5:7).

## **A Return to the Sources**

The Pentecostal hermeneutic is similar in some ways to the kind of hermeneutic that the advocates of *ressourcement* promoted. *Ressourcement* entails a return to the sources—Scripture, tradition, and spirituality—that prioritizes experience and faith including belief in the supernatural over that form of intellectualism that, in contrast, prioritizes empiricism and rigid historicity. While the canon of Scripture held by Catholics differs from that of Evangelicals, who tend to follow the Reformers in

this respect, both view the Scriptures as Spirit-inspired. Admittedly, some biblical scholars from both traditions place a higher value on empirical historicity than others, but historicity is only one of the criteria used to establish the interpretation of the biblical writings to the modern church. The Scriptures themselves emphasize that interpretation of Scripture must be based on the illumination that the Holy Spirit bestows.<sup>23</sup>

Raneiro Cantalamessa, preacher for the papal household during and since the time of John Paul II, has also called for a pneumatic hermeneutic, namely, a spiritual reading of the Scriptures that considers both the meaning intended by the human author and that intended by the divine.<sup>24</sup> He recalls the writer of 2 Timothy using the Greek *theopneustos* (God-breathed, 2 Tim 3:16) to refer to the theandric nature of Scripture, not only pointing to a dual authorship (human and divine) but also calling for a dual reading (literal and spiritual) of the text. Such a reading is one that looks not only back on the Hebrew Scriptures but forward to what the Holy Spirit has continued to do and say in the church up to the present. Referring to de Lubac's words written prior to Vatican II that it would take a "spiritual movement" to allow the church today to retrieve the spiritual exegesis practiced by the early Christian theologians,<sup>25</sup> Cantalamessa says:

Looking back at these words after some decades and with Vatican II between us, it seems to me that they are prophetic. That "spiritual movement" and that "élan" have begun to resurface, but not because men have programmed or foreseen them, but because from the four winds the Spirit has begun unexpectedly to blow again upon the dried up bones. Contemporaneously with the reappearance of the gifts, we also witness the reappearance of the spiritual reading of the Bible and this too is a fruit—one of the more exquisite—of the Spirit.

Cantalamessa describes the kind of scriptural reading I propose here, one that recognizes Christ in the Scriptures and that listens to what the Spirit has continued to say about him throughout the centuries, including recognizing in retrospect the mothers of the faith such

as Sarah as antetypes of spiritual motherhood that anticipate the role of the mother of the Messiah. This is the kind of interpretation that Cantalamessa refers to in describing what he hears while participating in Bible study groups:

I am stupefied in hearing, at times, reflections on God's word that are analogous to those offered by Origen, Augustine or Gregory the Great in their time, even if it is in a more simple language. The words about the temple, the "tent of David," about Jerusalem destroyed and rebuilt after the exile, are applied, in all simplicity, to the Church, to Mary, to one's own community and personal life.<sup>26</sup>

In this spiritual exegesis emerging from the scriptural reflections of the lay faithful can be discerned a move of the Spirit that is freeing them from the limits of scientific and historical criticism to allow them to receive a living word from the Spirit of God to the Church and the world of today.

### **"All These with One Accord" (Acts 1:14): An Ecumenical Mary**

The Spirit hermeneutic proposed here is essentially an ecumenical one. When I became Catholic over twenty years ago, I did not, indeed, could not, leave my Pentecostalism behind because it was such an integral part of who I was and still am. My longing for Christian unity continues to grow only stronger after experiencing firsthand the soul-piercing pain that the divisions in the church bring, especially for those who dare to cross the bridges that ecumenism purports to build as well as for their families and friends.

This hermeneutic is built on a love for the Scriptures, both the Hebrew and the Christian—for Christians, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is indeed the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—and for the Christian tradition through which the voice of the Spirit has been heard over the centuries. It is built also on the marriage of spirituality with theology, so that it can be fruitful; for

apart from the love of God, theologizing, like tongues, is merely “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). Finally, this hermeneutic is built on the personal disposition of persons, whether theologians or biblical scholars or practitioners, clergy or lay, to remain open to conversion, like Mary, to make every effort to respond to the voice of the Spirit as spoken to this present generation as well as to past generations, regardless of the cost. Clearly, Lonergan’s call to a conversion of love is essential not only for finding consensus about Mary but also for the entire ecumenical effort.

The attempt to find a Mary we can all love and honor together is obviously no easy task. Lonergan underscores the difficulty of overcoming cultural inheritances in ecumenical undertakings by explaining that sooner or later dialogues reach a stopping point since participants’ traditions ultimately present seemingly impassable obstacles. Though dialogue partners can achieve a degree of respect for the other’s position, they typically still consider it wrong. Understanding this helps me to be more realistic about what an ecumenical hermeneutic in and of itself can achieve. Nevertheless, Lonergan’s frequent reminders of the key role of conversion in the theological process are, in themselves, an admission that, provided people are receptive and willing, the Spirit of God can and does change hearts and minds despite what, humanly speaking, are insurmountable cultural impasses.

## Treasures Old and New

The hermeneutic proposed here is one that grounds any attempt at theological construction not on the *Zeitgeist* but primarily on the treasures of the church. Theologians should be like the wise scribe whom Jesus described as drawing from his storehouse treasures both old and new (Matt 13:52). A term for this approach was coined by theologians of the so-called school of *la nouvelle théologie, ressourcement*, mentioned earlier. It is “a return to the sources,” namely, to the Scriptures and to patristics, that is, the theologians who have spoken over the centuries. My own interest in *ressourcement* has nothing to do with a reaction against neo-Scholasticism as apparently was the case of the first proponents of *ressourcement*. Rather it is based

on the recognition of the foundational place that Scripture has in Christian theology as well as the appreciation I have acquired for the church fathers and mothers and other sources of the great tradition. The Scriptures must be interpreted not only through the lens of the church today but through that of the church of the last 2,000 years.<sup>27</sup> To disregard what the church has said for the last 2,000 years is, in effect, to disregard the voice of the Holy Spirit throughout that time or else to suggest that the Holy Spirit stopped speaking during that time. I make this point not to deny the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ,<sup>28</sup> but rather to recall what Christ told his disciples before his departure: that though he still had many things to tell them, they could not bear them yet, but when the Spirit of truth came, he would guide them into all truth (John 16:12–13).

## **Synthesis of Faith and Reason**

The marriage of theology and spirituality that is part of a Spirit hermeneutic is essentially doing theology on our knees, or, as von Balthasar calls it, “kneeling theology,” or, as Wainwright describes it, “doing the theological task in a liturgical perspective.”<sup>29</sup> Anselm refers to it as “faith seeking understanding.” It is the recognition that faith and reason are both integral to theology. Lonergan speaks of it as a synthesis: “If one is not to affirm reason at the expense of faith or faith at the expense of reason, one is called upon both to produce a synthesis that unites two orders of truth and to give evidence of a successful symbiosis of two principles of knowledge.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, reason alone is inadequate for the theological task; nevertheless, although faith always has precedence, reason is still essential since it is a God-given aspect of our humanity, an integral part of the *imago dei* that makes us unique in creation.

## **Conversion of Heart and Mind**

Saying yes to the call to conversion of mind and heart involves continuous repentance: the recognition of the constant need to repent in terms of our attitude toward each other, particularly our lack of humility and charity that makes us think that we are better than the other, or at least that we know better than the other (Phil 2:1–4).

The Marian problematic, as Congar so accurately assessed it, cannot be resolved simply by attaining a degree of theological consensus regarding her. It requires conversion, a change of mind *and* heart. Intellectually, it involves rejection of excess on the one hand and neglect on the other. Spiritually, it involves *rapprochement*, cultivating friendships, praying together, and listening to each other's viewpoints in "a spirit free of rancor, distrust, prejudice, and narrow-mindedness."<sup>31</sup> Lonergan speaks of love preceding knowledge and of the role it plays in ecumenism.<sup>32</sup> It is God's love for us and ours for God that inspires our love for each other and motivates us to seek common ground on which to build intellectual consensus with those from whom we have been separated for centuries. Ratzinger called for a change of heart toward those with whom we differ. For him, Christian unity requires more than reason:

It presupposes spiritual experience, penance [concrete acts of repentance], and conversion. . . . It begins quite concretely by overcoming mutual mistrust, the sociologically rooted defensive attitude against what is strange, belonging to another, and that we constantly take the Lord, whom after all we are seeking, more seriously than we take ourselves. He is our unity, what we have in common—no, who is the one who is common to and in all denominations.<sup>33</sup>

Ratzinger's reference to Jesus as the focal point of Christian unity leads to the question as to whether Mary too can become a point of unity. I would say, yes, Mary can, *if* Catholics and Evangelicals will listen to each other's heart—in the spirit of her own pondering in her heart—about what they believe about her and why and *if* they will listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through the church over the centuries and through their beloved, though separated, brothers and sisters in Christ today. Adopting the same pneumatic hermeneutic Mary herself used will provide an authentic basis upon which Evangelicals and Catholics can together honor this blessed woman as mother of the incarnate Son of God and, in some nuanced sense at least, as our shared mother in the faith and exemplar of life in the Spirit. Further,

using Mary's hermeneutic will provide a means by which we can reflect together about what the Holy Spirit has revealed in the Scriptures and in our respective traditions, so that, in time, we can bridge that gap in our thinking about her that has separated us too long.



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## Notes

- 1 Adapted from my “Overshadowed by the Spirit: Mary, Mother of Our Lord, Prototype of Spirit-Baptized Humanity” (PhD diss.: Regent University, 2016).
- 2 Yves Congar, “Conquering Our Enmities,” in *Steps to Christian Unity*, ed. John A. O’Brien (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964) 100.
- 3 Based on the premise that those accept “the decision in faith of the ancient Church” that the book of documents which we call the Bible is the Word of God and will read it “in intrinsic conjunction with the baptismal creed of the ancient Church” and recognize once again “the real claim it involves, it should not be too long before all sides can distinguish between essential and non-essential and so find the way to a diversified, pluriform unity.”
- 4 Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002); Kenneth Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004); Roger Stronstad, *Spirit, Scripture and Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Baguio City, Philippines: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press, 1995).
- 5 Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 138.
- 6 The various traditions have much to learn from each other, but quite honestly I do not see the scales as entirely balanced since a two-millennia tradition would appear in the natural at least to have more weight than a one- or three- or even five-hundred-year tradition. Please pardon my Catholic bias!
- 7 James B. Shelton, “The Miracles of Vatican II,” lecture, Men of the Upper Room, Church of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2012.
- 8 Kallistos, Bishop of Diokleia/Timothy Ware, “Tradition and Personal Experience in later Byzantine Theology,” *Eastern Churches Review* 3:2 (1970) 131-41.

9 Benedict XVI encourages scholars “to study the relationship between *Mariology and the theology of the word*. . . . Mary is the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the word of God, which took flesh in her. Mary also symbolizes openness to God and others; an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the word becomes a way of life.” *Verbum domini (On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church)*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, September 30, 2010 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010) §27. Andreas Hoeck says that Peter uses a Marian hermeneutic in his first speech in Acts. The speech demonstrates the apostles’ high degree of sensitivity to the scriptural authority, especially that of the ancient prophets. “The Apostolic Speeches in Acts and Seminary Teaching Methods” (paper presented at the Second Quinn Conference, University of St. Thomas at Saint Paul, Minn., June 9–11, 2011) 3.

10 For John Henry Newman, “Mary is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it . . . first believing without reasoning, next from love and reverence, reasoning after believing. And thus she symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the doctors of the Church also, who have to investigate, and weigh, and define, as well as to profess the Gospel.” “The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine,” in *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between A.D. 1826 and 1843* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1900) 313. Sally Cunneen also points out Newman’s appreciation of Mary’s “reliance on observation and judgment as well as her ability to live with ambivalence.” “Breaking Mary’s Silence: A Feminist Reflection on Marian Piety,” *Theology Today* 56:3 (1999) 323.

11 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1990).

12 S. Shelton, “Overshadowed by the Spirit.”

13 John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

14 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1992).

15 Lonergan, *Insight*, 746.

16 Lonergan, *Method*, 130.

17 René Laurentin calls the different portrayals of Mary given by the biblical authors as a “biblical pluralism . . . [that] can broaden our field of vision . . . [and] lead to an open-minded re-appraisal of a fullness of light transcending the bounds of our individual horizons. The light may come to us through different intermediaries: Paul, Luke, John, but it has only one original source shining through our differing cultures and denominations: the only Holy Spirit.” “Pluralism about Mary: Biblical and Contemporary,” in *Mary and Ecumenism: Papers of the 1981 International Congress of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, ed. James Walsh (London: The Way, 1982) 91.

18 Oberman, “Evangelical Perspective,” 273.

19 The term “separated brethren” was used in Vatican II’s decree on ecumenism to refer to non-Catholic Christians. I use the term here in a reciprocal sense, to refer to

the way both Catholics and non-Catholics tend to view each other. Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis redintegratio*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI, November 21, 1964: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html) .

20 Lonergan, *Method*, 161.

21 Lonergan, *Method*, 106.

22 Catholic Church, International Theological Commission, "Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria," *Origins* 41:40 (March 15, 2012) 641–61; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 138. Drawing from C. S. Peirce, Yong speaks of the provisional nature of theological propositions as fallibilism: "All theological claims are fallible at worst and partial at best, subject to the ongoing quest driven by the pneumatological imagination. Yong, "The Hermeneutical Trialectic: Notes Toward a Consensual Hermeneutic and Theological Method," *Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004) 33; Yong, "The Demise of Foundationalism and the Retention of Truth: What Evangelicals Can Learn from C. S. Peirce," *Christian Scholar's Review* 29:3 (2000) 570–71. Faith and Order Commission, *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics*, Faith and Order Paper, 182 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1998) §A2: "Faith also relies upon human forms of expression and interpretation, dialogue and communication, all of which are fragile and all too often fragmented embodiments, none of which is completely adequate, of the mystery which has been revealed. . . . Only at the end of time will the Church's contemplation of God's revealed mystery go beyond a partial knowledge and arrive at that 'knowing even as we are known' of which Paul writes in 1 Cor 13:9–12."

23 Balthasar sees Christ as God's own exegesis of himself, i.e., the one who makes God known through the incarnation (John 1:18). The Holy Spirit interprets Christ to humanity in every age in a way that is ever new, yet ever the same. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "God Is His Own Exegete," *Communio* 13:4 (1986) 280–87.

24 Raneiro Cantalamessa, "'Scripture Breathes Forth God': 4th Lenten Sermon of Father Cantalamessa," *Zenit*, March 14, 2008 [6 pp.]. Online <http://www.zenit.org/article-22059?l=english>. It is this same type of reading to which Francis Martin and Clark Pinnock refer. See, e.g., Martin, "Spirit and Flesh in the Doing of Theology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18 (2001) 5–31. Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993) 3–23.

25 Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 193.

26 Raneiro Cantalamessa, "Scripture Breathes Forth God."

27 Walter Brueggeman defines hermeneutic as "a proposal for reading reality through a certain lens." "II Kings 18–19: The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 7:1 (1985) 22. An ecumenical hermeneutic then would be one that can use different lenses as needed.

28 Joseph Ratzinger, later Benedict XVI, describes "the kernel of the New Testament, that is, to what alone justifies the very existence of Christendom" as "faith in truth disclosing itself." "What Unites and Divides Denominations? Ecumenical Reflections," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 1:2 (March–April 1972) 116.

- 29 Hans Urs von Balthasar warns of “theology at prayer” being superseded by “theology at the desk.” “Theology and Sanctity,” in his *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1, *The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 208. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Orthodoxy: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 5.
- 30 Lonergan, *Insight*, 754–55.
- 31 Congar, “Conquering,” 108–9.
- 32 Lonergan, *Method*, 122–23.
- 33 Joseph Ratzinger, “What Unites and Divides Denominations? Ecumenical Reflections,” *Communio* 1:2 (1972) 119.

