

## MARY THE PERFECT DISCIPLE: A PARADIGM FOR MARIOLOGY

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**F**OR THE CENTURY up to the Second Vatican Council, the study of Mary and her role in the mystery of salvation was vigorously pursued, and Mariology was a very respectable discipline within the broad embrace of theology in general. But in the wake of the Council's important decision to include its statement on Mary in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, Mariology suffered a decline in interest for several years. This was due to a variety of reasons, not least of which was the fact that the Council's teachings in the major areas of ecclesiology and Christology opened up new perspectives which theologians were drawn to explore and develop more profoundly to the neglect of other areas in theology. In more recent times, however, theologians have again turned their attention to Mary, and much valuable work is being done today.

But this revitalized interest in Mary differs significantly from the old Mariology. In fact, it is no longer fashionable to talk of "Mariology," and many theologians are reluctant to be known as Mariologists. This is more than a matter of fashionable terminology. It is a reflection of the postconciliar understanding of the nature of theology itself. The mystery of Mary is part of the total mystery of Christ and his salvific work. Mariology has been reabsorbed into Christology, and it is with Christ as the focal point of interest that Mary is studied. Of course, earlier Mariologists were very conscious that the significance of Mary in the plan of salvation was essentially linked to the mystery of Christ, and they were at great pains to point out that her role was essentially subordinate to that of her Son, who was the sole redeemer of mankind. Nevertheless, they did tend to think of Mariology as a distinct "science" under the umbrella of theology in general, and Mary (not Christ) was certainly the focal point of their study.

But there is a deeper reason why today Marian studies are no longer undertaken in the spirit of the older Mariology. It concerns the very understanding that Mariologists had of their "science," and it may be illustrated by considering a problem that engrossed these scholars for the best part of a hundred years: What is the fundamental principle of Mariology? What is the key feature about Mary that will serve as a foundation upon which the whole edifice of Marian doctrine can be built?

Most Mariologists proposed in one form or another that Mary's divine maternity—that she is the mother of God-made-man—was the basic

principle on which the whole of theology about Mary rests.<sup>1</sup> But this opinion was not without its difficulties. The study of Mary revolves round two poles, both of which have been sanctioned by a long tradition in the Church: Mary is the mother of Christ who is God-made-man, and Mary is the associate of Christ in his work of redemption (though in a subordinate role). The problem arises from the fact that Mary's divine maternity and her association with the Redeemer in his saving work are quite distinct ideas. The divine maternity as such does not imply Mary's share in the work of redemption, for there is no intrinsic connection between it and participation in that work. We may know in fact that Mary cooperated with her Son, but the mere fact that she is his mother does not of itself provide an explanation why she should have been associated with his work, nor does it provide the "germ" from which all her other privileges spring.<sup>2</sup>

In the face of these difficulties some theologians have proposed that Mariology rests on a complex principle (e.g., Mary is the mother of the whole Christ<sup>3</sup>) or on a double principle (e.g., Mary is mother of God and Mary is the associate of her Son the Redeemer<sup>4</sup>). But these solutions were not acceptable to the majority of scholars, who sought a single principle as the only way to safeguard the unity of their discipline, which they saw as a true and distinct science.

And so other theologians proposed new candidates for the role of fundamental principle grounding the whole science of Mariology. Some, influenced by the Fathers and the Eve-Mary parallel, proposed that Mary's coredemptive role should hold pride of place.<sup>5</sup> Others urged that Mary as the prototype of the Church holds the key,<sup>6</sup> or her fulness of grace;<sup>7</sup> and more recently Karl Rahner argued strongly for consideration of Mary the most perfectly redeemed as providing the foundation on

<sup>1</sup> For a good account of the controversy, see the essay by C. Vollert, S.J., "The Fundamental Principle of Mariology," in J. B. Carol, ed., *Mariology 2* (Milwaukee, 1957) 30-87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 142-43.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., G. M. Roschini, O.S.M., *Mariology 1* (2d ed.; Rome, 1947) 337; N. García Garcés, C.M.F., *Mater coredemptrix* (Turin-Rome, 1940) 121-23.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., J. Bittremieux, "De principio supremo Mariologiae," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 8 (1931) 250-51; C. Dillenschneider, *La mariologie de St. Alphonse de Liguori* (Fribourg, 1934) 56.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., S. Alameda, O.S.B., "El primer principio mariológico según los Padres," *Estudios Marianos* 3 (1944) 163-86; L. P. Everett, C.Ss.R., "The Nexus between Mary's Co-redemptive Role and Her Other Prerogatives," *Marian Studies* 2 (1951) 129-52.

<sup>6</sup> O. Semmelroth, S.J., *Urbild der Kirche* (Würzburg, 1950) 37 f.

<sup>7</sup> A. Müller, "Um die Grundlagen der Mariologie," *Divus Thomas* 29 (1951) 389. A summary of this article in English, under the title "The Basic Principles of Mariology," appears in *Theology Digest* 1 (1953) 139-44.

which a true Mariology should be built.<sup>8</sup> But these solutions are not wholly acceptable; for either they actually presuppose Mary's divine maternity instead of providing a foundation for it, or they lack the breadth and richness necessary to support the other privileges accorded the Blessed Virgin.

However, it seems to me that this whole controversy rests on a misconception as to the nature of "science" itself, and a fortiori as to the nature of Mariology as a science, albeit of a special sort. And this is why the old-style Mariology is not, and should not be, acceptable today. For the understanding of the nature of theology as a science has been dominated by the old medieval model, whereby a science was thought to rest on a bed of fundamental principles, from which new conclusions could be deduced by the addition of further premises (facts, observed data) and logical reasoning. Thus a science, whether inductive or deductive, is seen to be an ordered body of knowledge, wherein each piece is related to every other piece and the whole ordered to unity by the relationship each piece has to the bedrock of basic principles or axioms, which are received from a "higher" science or taken simply as "given." Thus science is like "a constellation of facts, theories, and methods" revolving round a nucleus of set principles. And "scientific development becomes the piecemeal process by which these items have been added, simply and in combination, to the ever growing stockpile that constitutes scientific technique and knowledge."<sup>9</sup>

The quest for a fundamental principle of Mariology shows that it has been thought of as conforming to this model of a typical science. Instead of premises from observed data, the theologian works from what is given in revelation, but he still endeavors to construct a system of ordered knowledge based on a few fundamental beliefs or principles. Increase in theological knowledge is seen as a cumulative process which knows no end, given the inexhaustible riches of the heart of Christ, the revelation of the Father, and the ingenuity of the human mind.

#### THE NATURE OF A PARADIGM

Recent studies of philosophers, and especially by historians of science, have shown that this understanding of growth in science as "development by accumulation" is not borne out by the historical facts.<sup>10</sup> Rather,

<sup>8</sup> K. Rahner, S.J., "Le principe fondamental de la théologie mariale," *RSR* 42 (1954) 481-522. Rahner has also put forward this opinion in many of his other writings: see in particular "The Immaculate Conception" and "The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption," in *Theological Investigations* 1 (London, 1961) 201-27.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2d ed.; Chicago, 1970) 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> In particular, Kuhn's book has been very important in exposing this misunderstanding of the nature of science. Although not all of his conclusions have escaped criticism, there has been widespread acceptance of his contention that the study of the history and development of various particular sciences shows how mistaken the "textbook" conception of science must be.

particular sciences grew and developed in a manner quite at variance with what early theories on the nature of science would have us believe. Instead of a science growing through a smooth and gradual accumulation of new data, theories, and methods, like the orderly building up of a stockpile of knowledge which can be handed on intact to succeeding generations of scientists, the historical picture suggests rather a zigzag pattern with a science lurching from one theoretical system to another, forsaking much that was considered "dogma" by an earlier generation of scientists, and building up in its place a new synthesis of theory and fact. These striking changes of direction have been quite justifiably called "revolutions" in science.

These "revolutions" are triggered off by the introduction of a paradigm. The notion of a paradigm was introduced by Thomas Kuhn in his justly famous book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In the first edition of this work the notion of a paradigm was vague and Kuhn was not always consistent in his use of the term.<sup>11</sup> In a postscript to the second edition and in subsequent essays<sup>12</sup> Kuhn identified two principal acceptations of "paradigm." One uses the word in a sociological sense: a paradigm is "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given (scientific) community."<sup>13</sup> He prefers to call a paradigm in this sense a "disciplinary matrix,"<sup>14</sup> and it will not concern us here. The other sense is much narrower and uses paradigm to denote "one sort of element in that constellation (sc. in the sociological paradigm or disciplinary matrix), the concrete puzzle-solutions, which employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science."<sup>15</sup> A paradigm in this sense, then, is an example shared by members of the scientific community, and Kuhn prefers to call it an "exemplar."<sup>16</sup> It is a paradigm in this second sense, as an exemplar, that seems to me to be susceptible of fruitful application to the theology of Mary and which I would like to develop here.

Paradigms, then, are scientific achievements which are "sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Masterman in her sympathetic and critical essay lists twenty-one different senses of "paradigm" as used by Kuhn in his book; see "The Nature of a Paradigm," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (Cambridge Univ., 1970) 61-65.

<sup>12</sup> T. S. Kuhn, "Reflections on My Critics," *ibid.* 234, 271-73; "Second Thoughts on Paradigms," in *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, ed. F. Suppe (Urbana, Ill., 1970).

<sup>13</sup> "Postscript," in 2nd ed. of *Scientific Revolutions* 175; also Masterman, "Nature of a Paradigm" 66-68.

<sup>14</sup> "Reflections on My Critics" 271; *Scientific Revolutions* 182.

<sup>15</sup> *Scientific Revolutions* 175.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 187; "Reflections on my Critics" 272.

competing modes of scientific activity," and "sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to solve."<sup>17</sup> They are examples of actual scientific practice which combine law, theory, experimentation, and application, and which serve as models from which a coherent tradition of scientific research and practice can spring. Examples of paradigms in the history of science would be the research, theory, and observation of Copernicus which resulted in his heliocentric model of the universe and which gave rise to what is known as "Copernican astronomy"; Rutherford's and Bohr's work which produced a model of an atom,<sup>18</sup> portraying it as a miniature solar system with particles revolving round a nucleus—a paradigm which suggested that the atom could be divided, thus giving rise to Rutherford's great achievement in splitting the atom, which would have been impossible under the earlier understanding of an atom as something like a ball bearing, hard and indivisible. The history of physical optics shows that advances were made through the appearances of successive paradigms, each replacing the previous one and introducing a new set of problems to engage the attention of the scientists: in the eighteenth century Newton's *Opticks* provided a paradigm which suggested that light was material corpuscles; early in the next century the optical writings of Young and Fresnel led to the replacement of this paradigm with one which taught that light was transverse wave motion; and now in our century, under the influence of the work of Planck, Einstein, and others, we are taught that light is made up of photons (quantum-mechanical entities that seem to show some properties suggestive of waves and some suggestive of particles).<sup>19</sup> As Kuhn remarks, "These transformations of the paradigms of physical optics are scientific revolutions, and the successive transition from one to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science."<sup>20</sup>

A paradigm is a concrete achievement in a science, and very often it finds its way as an example of a puzzle-solution into the textbooks which initiate students into the ways of the science and qualify them to become members of that community. The great value of a paradigm is that it enables the practitioners of a science to take a common body of belief for

<sup>17</sup> *Scientific Revolutions* 10.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, the history of the development of this model is very complicated: Bohr worked on Rutherford's initial model to remove its inconsistency with the Maxwell-Lorentz theory of electromagnetism, and in so doing he brought about a revolution in atomic physics; see the account by Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* 140-54, and by Kuhn, "Reflections on my Critics" 256-57.

<sup>19</sup> *Scientific Revolutions* 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 12.

granted, without having to build the field anew from its foundations. They can then concentrate on the puzzles and problems which the paradigm generates, and it is in solving these that science advances.

When a paradigm first comes to light in a science, it is not precisely a theory; rather, as a solution to a concrete puzzle it can generate a theory which ensures that the exemplar will have wider application in solving other related puzzles. Thus a paradigm can be prior to theory,<sup>21</sup> for it is the "tool" or "device" with which a theory is often constructed. For example, the whole of modern atomic theory is rooted in the paradigm-model of an atom, and not (as is often thought) the other way round: the model is not merely an illustration of the theory (though it can serve that purpose).

However, this is not to say that a paradigm is theory-neutral. Quite the opposite. The paradigm which signals a revolution in the science could not have been thought of in a vacuum. It comes to light only when there is a problem in the science which the existing theory cannot solve. Paradigms are produced by scientists, who therefore are already imbued with scientific theory and who can see the problem only in terms of the accepted theory. Even though the new paradigm signals the eventual replacement of that theory, it would be foolish to maintain that it in no way owes its origin to the previous theory.

On the other hand, paradigms which are used as exemplars in textbooks for the introduction of new members into the scientific community are definitely "theory-charged." Such a paradigm is not simply a successful experiment or piece of research, but it makes sense only in the light of the theory which backs it up. In the textbook it serves as a model which vividly illustrates law, theory, and application, and gives promise of further application extending ultimately to the whole field of the science, or at least a significant portion of it.

The paradigm provides a point of view, a "way of seeing."<sup>22</sup> If Ptolemy and Copernicus were to see the same sunrise, the former with his geocentric paradigm would see the sun moving above the horizon, whereas the latter with his heliocentric paradigm would see the earth moving across and away from the face of the sun. The paradigm is the key which *makes sense* of problems and theories in a science. The atomic theory makes sense only in the light of the atomic model. In genetics the genetic code is explained by means of a "picture" of language, which has now been extended to include not only "letters" and "words" but also "sentences" and "punctuation."<sup>23</sup> The function of the code (e.g., sending

<sup>21</sup> Masterman, "Nature of a Paradigm" 66; Kuhn, "Reflections on My Critics" 271.

<sup>22</sup> Masterman, "Nature of a Paradigm" 76-79.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 78-79.

“messages”) makes sense in terms of this language-communication paradigm. Moreover, the paradigm regulates the meaning of words used to articulate theory. This becomes clear when a revolution is taking place in science. Practitioners of the old and new school may be using the same words but with different meanings, which may not be noticed, thus adding to the confusion and breakdown in communication. For example, consider

the men who called Copernicus mad because he proclaimed that the earth moved. They were not either just wrong or quite wrong. Part of what they meant by “earth” was fixed position. Their earth, at least, could not be moved. Correspondingly, Copernicus’s innovation was not simply to move the earth. Rather, it was a whole new way of regarding the problems of physics and astronomy, one that necessarily changed the meaning of both “earth” and “motion.” Without those changes the concept of a moving earth was mad.<sup>24</sup>

The paradigm, then, provides a perspective, a way of seeing, in terms of which phenomena are to be explained. But this is not a form of reductionism, as if everything was to be reduced to the simple paradigm and explained as being merely one of its complicated forms. Nor does it mean that everything is to be logically deduced from the paradigm. (The “fundamental principle” in Mariology was sometimes thought to work in one or both of these ways.) Rather, the phenomenon or whatever is to be explained is seen in its own right—it is the *object* of investigation—but the investigation is conducted in the light of the paradigm. The model of the hydrogen atom sheds light on the nature of other atoms. This does not mean that other atoms are thought to be complicated forms of hydrogen, but rather that the *structure* of the hydrogen atom (charged particle revolving round a nucleus) suggests that other atoms may have an analogous structure: i.e., they too can be seen in terms of charged particles, nucleus, etc. A law such as Newton’s Second Law of Motion,  $f = ma$ , is not simply duplicated in solving the problems of free fall or pendulum motion. Rather, this formula is merely a law-sketch or schema that suggests an analogy according to which other formulae are devised to deal with these forms of motion.<sup>25</sup> But in dealing with these problems the scientist is studying free fall or pendulum motion, not possible ramifications of the basic formula. (This point has important application in this essay. We shall be going on to discuss Mary’s motherhood and her virginity in the light of the paradigm of discipleship. But this does not mean that these privileges will be reduced to forms of discipleship, nor will they be deduced from her discipleship.)

Despite what has just been said, however, there is a certain reciprocity

<sup>24</sup> Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions* 149–50.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 188–89.

between the paradigm and its application in the solving of scientific puzzles. The paradigm provides the key to possible solutions; but on the other hand, the successful application of the exemplar throws light on what the paradigm itself means. To take the example of Newton's Second Law again:  $f = ma$  can be applied to such diverse motions as free fall, the simple pendulum, a pair of interacting harmonic oscillators, and so on. In all these cases, as the student works to solve problems concerning these different kinds of movement, he not only learns how the world behaves, but he also learns what the symbols in the formula mean. "Contemplating the examples is an essential part (though only part) of learning what the words in that law mean individually and collectively, or in learning how they attach to nature. Equally it is part of learning how the world behaves. The two cannot be separated."<sup>26</sup>

A paradigm comes to be replaced usually when it meets some recalcitrant phenomena which it cannot explain. If after repeated and sustained attempts at solution, including modification of the existing paradigm, the phenomena still resist satisfactory explanation, the science may enter into a period of crisis, which will only be resolved by the emergence of a new paradigm. This new paradigm initially may do little more than accommodate the recalcitrant phenomena, but if it gives promise of wider application and can provide explanation of much else in the field of the science, it may eventually win members of the scientific community to its side, thus establishing itself as the paradigm for further research and superseding the old. A revolution has occurred, though usually it takes considerable time for a new paradigm to find secure acceptance in a scientific community. Practicing scientists quite naturally resist the innovation, for they are reluctant to forsake a paradigm which has worked fruitfully for them in the past, and they are not at all ready to concede that the problem-phenomena are not capable of explanation in terms of the old paradigm. Moreover, the adoption of the new paradigm means that they have to approach their science from a quite different point of view and under the light of a new theory. Thus they will have to call into question the common body of belief which hitherto they had taken for granted. What once was dogma is now shown to be susceptible of different explanation, and cherished beliefs have to be forsaken. Not unnaturally, then, a new paradigm usually meets resistance from the scientific establishment. New ideas seldom convince their opponents; rather, they outlive them. A new generation uncommitted to the old ideas learns the new ways and grows up taking them for granted; and so eventually the new paradigm wins out, even though its status in the science may not be

<sup>26</sup> Kuhn, "Reflections on My Critics" 274; see also the whole discussion, 272-77; *Scientific Revolutions* 187-91.



secure till the older practitioners have died out.<sup>27</sup> No one now believes in Ptolomaic astronomy or that atoms are like ball bearings.

This rough sketch of the role of paradigms in science, though by no means complete,<sup>28</sup> is nevertheless sufficient to show that the notion of a paradigm can be fruitfully applied to the study of theology.

#### THE ROLE OF A PARADIGM IN THEOLOGY

The history of Mariology reveals a pattern analogous to that of other sciences. Mary has been understood in different lights down through the ages according as one or other of her virtues or roles is stressed in order to hold her up as the model for some aspect of Christian life. In the very early years she was seen as the "second Eve"; in the Constantinian period she was described as the model of asceticism, "the perfect Egyptian nun";<sup>29</sup> in the Middle Ages she was hailed in chivalrous terms as "Our Lady," the symbol of chaste love; the Renaissance saw emphasis placed on her tender love as the spiritual mother of all men. And in our own century, which has seen a great upsurge in rigorous study of Mariology, the quest for a "fundamental principle" has led to her being exalted as the "mediatrix of all graces," "coredemptrix," "mother of the Church," and so on.

Many of these different understandings of Mary played a role similar to that of a paradigm in science. They unified the study of Mary. They provided a model around which appreciation of, and devotion to, Mary could find its focal point. As mentioned earlier, I consider it wrong to look for a fundamental principle in Mariology which will unify the science and provide a basis upon which all further conclusions can be reasoned to. Rather, the desired unity can be found in a key model, a paradigm, which is rich and powerful enough to provide a vantage point from which to view all the other great truths about Mary. This paradigm or model affords a perspective in the light of which all the other attributes of Mary *make sense*. It determines our view of Mary and provides a touchstone of meaning and explanation.

No one paradigm can exhaust the mystery that is Mary's role in salvation. This is another reason why it is fruitless to look for a fundamental principle which pretends to be the "germ" from which the fulness

<sup>27</sup> Max Planck sadly observed in his autobiography: "a new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it" (*Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers* [New York, 1949] 33-34).

<sup>28</sup> For readers who wish to deepen their understanding of paradigms, I recommend a study of the works of Kuhn (nn. 9 and 12 above) and the essay by Masterman (n. 11 above).

<sup>29</sup> Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London, 1963) 50.

of the mystery of Mary can be generated and which only awaits "teasing out" for all knowledge of her to stand revealed.

However, the role of a model in theology and the role of a paradigm in science do not match perfectly. Differences arise because of the differing natures of the respective disciplines and because of the different contexts in which these models must operate. In theology the model operates in the context of a faith community and is subject to what is given in revelation; in science the paradigm operates in the context of a scientific community and is subject to the phenomena of nature. Moreover, when a new model arises in theology, it does not automatically spell the abandonment of a whole body of belief previously taken for granted. The continuity of belief (tradition) is an essential feature of Christian faith and doctrine. Much more of value can be gained for theology from the study of the Fathers of the Church and the earlier masters of theology than a practicing scientist (as distinct from a historian of science) would find in studying the early history of his discipline. A theologian is duty-bound to take account of what his predecessors have said; a scientist is not.

A paradigm in science and a paradigm in theology both share a certain "concreteness." A scientific paradigm is a concrete achievement in the discipline (e.g., an experiment or the formulation of a law) which has such far-reaching effects that it gives a new direction and redefines the limits of the science. A theological model is not quite like that, though it too must give direction to theological investigation and provide a basis from which a theological structure can be generated. However, its "concreteness" is not that of a specific achievement (experiment or formula). Rather, it is "concrete" in the sense that it is a datum of revelation. It must not itself be the fruit of theological or philosophical speculation; instead, it must be something clearly revealed by God, and this normally means that it must be clearly contained in Scripture.

The value of a theological model is to be measured by the explanatory power it has, by the light it throws on the data of revelation as found in Scripture and the tradition of the Church. In this it is similar to a paradigm, which, if it is to be successful in science, must be able to throw a new light over the whole field of that science. It must have explanatory power sufficient to bring all the relevant data and phenomena (or at least a significant portion thereof) under the one theory and into a coherent system.

A theological paradigm is different from a model as it is usually understood in theology. For example, Mary is often hailed as a model of the Church. From the explanation already given it should be clear that a paradigm is not a model in any consequent sense, where the model is

understood as a (scale) reproduction of an original, as one can buy a "model" of the *Pietà* at any souvenir shop in Rome. Nor is it a model in an anterior sense, where the model serves as a guide to the construction of some artifact, as an artist uses a model for his painting or sculpture, or as an architect uses a blueprint for the construction of a building. Nor is a paradigm a model in the moral sense of being someone worthy of imitation. Mary is often seen as a model in all of these senses: she is held up for veneration as the model of all virtues, she is a model of the Church inasmuch as she embodies in herself all the qualities that are found in the Church (consequent sense), and she is held up as the model of all the virtues that the Church should have (anterior sense).<sup>30</sup>

A paradigm must also be distinguished from a scientific model used as an analogy to help visualize, often in a simplified way, something that cannot be directly observed; for example, a model of an atom constructed from pieces of wire and plastic balls. This sort of model is consequent on scientific theory; it does not generate it. Nor is a paradigm in theology the same as what Avery Dulles, S.J., calls an "explanatory model" which serves "to synthesize what we already know or at least are inclined to believe"<sup>31</sup> (for example, the Gospel parables of the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven). Although a paradigm does have an explanatory and a synthesizing function, it is not limited to synthesizing *what we already know*; rather, it must hold promise of giving us new knowledge, at least in the sense of revealing new insights into the mystery of faith. Moreover, as Fr. Dulles' examples show, an explanatory model in this sense is limited in scope; it is not radical enough to encompass the whole field. A paradigm is closer to Dulles' other sort of model: the "exploratory or heuristic" model, which is capable of leading to new theological insights.<sup>32</sup> However, inasmuch as he contrasts it with the explanatory model, he seems to imply that it does not have a synthesizing or unifying function, which a paradigm certainly does have. In fact, a paradigm is more radical than both the explanatory model and the exploratory model; it combines features of both and licenses the use of both within the theological enterprise, as does a scientific paradigm, which dictates which analogies and models are acceptable illustrations of the theory sanctioned by the paradigm.<sup>33</sup>

A paradigm must also be distinguished from another related idea that

<sup>30</sup> R. Laurentin, "Marie et l'anthropologie chrétienne de la femme," *NRT* 89 (1967) 489, 513.

<sup>31</sup> Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church* (New York, 1974) 22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 23-24.

<sup>33</sup> In fact, Dulles does discuss the notion of Kuhn's paradigm and uses it extensively throughout his book (26-30 and *passim*). However, he does not explain it very fully and seems not to exploit its rich potential in his discussion of various ecclesiological models.

has been widely used in contemporary theology: an archetype. Mary has been described as an archetype of the Church<sup>34</sup> or as the archetype of womanhood and the feminine.<sup>35</sup> An archetype can be taken in a Platonic sense, where it means an Idea, a perfect exemplar, of which existent things in our world are only shadowy imitations. This is not a paradigm in our sense. An archetype can also be taken in a Jungian sense. For Jung, the essence of an archetype is that "it represents in itself something that is not wholly understandable and that it hints only intuitively at its possible meaning."<sup>36</sup> The archetype exists on the level of the "collective unconscious" and it finds conscious expression in the variety of images and myths which make their way into the conscious life of men.<sup>37</sup> The paradigm, on the other hand, does not operate on the unconscious level, and although it may give rise to theory and explanatory images, these are not myths.

#### THE PARADIGM OF "MARY THE PERFECT DISCIPLE"

Under the influence of modern biblical scholarship, the notion of discipleship has resumed a central place in the Church's spirituality and theology—not that it ever really disappeared from the Christian consciousness. In particular, Mary has been held up as a model of discipleship, as the "perfect disciple." This understanding of Mary has been receiving increasing attention from theologians and biblical scholars of late,<sup>38</sup> and I would like to suggest that here we see emerging a new paradigm for the understanding of Mary in this age: Mary the perfect disciple.

By means of the perspective given by this paradigm, Mary's divine motherhood, her role in the Church, and the true significance of her virginity can be understood coherently as facets of the one whole which is the mystery of Mary in the plan of man's salvation. I personally believe that the other great privileges of Mary can be seen in this light too, but

<sup>34</sup> E.g., Otto Semmelroth, S.J., *Mary, Archetype of the Church* (New York, 1963); Herbert Richardson, "Mother of the Church," *The Current* (Harvard) 5 (1965) 48–61 (summary in *TD* 14 [1966] 60).

<sup>35</sup> E.g., R. Laurentin, "Foi et mythe en théologie mariale," *NRT* 89 (1967) 281–307; "Marie et l'anthropologie chrétienne de la femme," *ibid.* 485–515.

<sup>36</sup> Carl G. Jung, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* 6 (London, 1971) 106.

<sup>37</sup> Laurentin, "Foi et mythe" 294; also Thomas O'Meara, O.P., "Marian Theology and the Problem of Myth," *Marian Studies* 15 (1964) 132–40.

<sup>38</sup> See especially Raymond E. Brown, S.S., "The Meaning of Modern New Testament Studies for an Ecumenical Understanding of Mary," in his *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church* (London, 1975); "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel," *TS* 36 (1975) 688–99, esp. 695–99; *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York, 1977) 316–19; also John de Satgé, *Mary and the Christian Gospel* (London, 1976) 53–81; R. E. Brown, K. P. Donfried, J. A. Fitzmyer, and J. Reumann, *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1978).

for the purposes of this essay I shall concentrate only on the three attributes just mentioned, for that will suffice to show the explanatory power of the paradigm and how it can serve as a unifying force for contemporary theology about Mary.

It must also be said that when we say Mary is the "perfect disciple," we do not intend to imply that she was a member of that select group of followers who accompanied Jesus in his work of preaching throughout the country. There is no evidence to suggest that she was especially chosen by Christ to be a disciple in this sense. In fact, what little evidence there is would seem to suggest that she was not.<sup>39</sup> But on the other hand, none of the Gospels portrays her positively as an unbeliever.<sup>40</sup> In fact, Luke is at pains to mention that she was a member of the postresurrection group of believers (Acts 1:14). We must, therefore, take a broader notion of discipleship and understand it in terms of an attitude of heart and mind in relation to Jesus.

First of all, the scriptural basis for this paradigm. If a theological paradigm is to be "concrete" in a way analogous to the way a scientific paradigm is a "concrete achievement," then it must be a clear datum in Scripture—a "concrete fact," albeit revealed—and not the fruit of later theological speculation. The historicity of details in Scripture about Mary is problematic. She figures most prominently in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, but precisely because there is so much question about the historicity of these narratives, it is very difficult to point to any detail concerning Mary and maintain that it is unquestionably a historical fact. The Gospel of John is also fraught with difficulties when it is a question of discerning the historical basis of what was written. Mary is mentioned only twice—at Cana and at Calvary—and although both these episodes are highly significant for the Evangelist, their historicity is not beyond doubt. John is the only Evangelist to report the Cana episode and he alone places Mary on Calvary. Moreover, John's Gospel is a sophisticated theological witness to God's saving action in his Son, Jesus Christ; history is subordinated to the theological design. And although scholars today are becoming increasingly sensitive to John as a historical witness to the life of Christ,<sup>41</sup> there is still much debate as to what precisely is historical and what is merely literary device at the service of theological insight.

Fortunately, there is an episode reported in all three Synoptic Gospels which can fairly claim to have a historical basis, precisely because it does not portray (at least at first sight) the mother of Jesus in a favorable

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *Birth of the Messiah* 32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 317, n. 59.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge Univ., 1963); A. M. Hunter, *According to John* (London, 1968).

light. It is important because it provides us with an understanding of what it means to be a disciple and also because it concerns Mary. Thus it provides us with the starting point in our quest for clear concrete teaching concerning Mary the disciple. We find this episode in Mt 12:46-50, Mk 3:31-35, and Lk 8:19-21. Jesus is teaching when his mother and brothers arrive to speak to him. He takes the occasion to point out that the relation of discipleship is closer to his heart than family ties. Matthew and Mark relate the incident with essentially the same emphasis. Mark's account reads thus:

His mother and brothers now arrived and, standing outside, sent in a message asking for him. A crowd was sitting round him at the time the message was passed to him, "your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you." He replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking round at those sitting in a circle about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother."

Matthew makes quite explicit the fact that he was referring to his *disciples* rather than to the whole crowd of those who were listening to him: "And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'" (Mt 12:49).

The point of the account in both Matthew and Mark is quite clearly that in Jesus' hierarchy of values those who are bound to him through their readiness to do the will of God are of greater worth than those bound to him merely through family ties. This emphasis ties in well with other reported sayings of Jesus in Matthew and Mark: "Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:37);<sup>42</sup> and his injunction to "follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead" (Mt 8:22), in reply to the young man who wanted to discharge an urgent family obligation before throwing in his lot with Jesus wholeheartedly.

The import of these passages cannot be mistaken. In Jesus' estimation, discipleship is more important than family relationships. But the incident as related by Mark and Matthew seems to imply also a *rejection* of his mother and relatives in favor of his "family" of disciples. In Brown's judgment, "clearly he is replacing his natural family with a family of believers, those who do the will of God."<sup>43</sup> This implied rejection (if it is such), however, is secondary to the main point of the passage, which emphasizes that doing the will of God is something of greater value than even being the mother of Jesus. The idiom in which this message is conveyed certainly suggests a refusal on the part of Jesus to acknowledge

<sup>42</sup> Cf. also Jesus' promise of rewards for those who leave "house, brothers, sisters, father, children, or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel" (Mk 10:29).

<sup>43</sup> Brown, "Understanding Mary" 90.

his family, but it is difficult to know for certain whether the Evangelist definitely wished to give that impression. Mark does not mention Mary in any significant fashion elsewhere in his Gospel, nor does Matthew apart from the infancy narrative.<sup>44</sup> Thus we do not know how these two Evangelists understood Jesus' relationship to his mother (apart from the fact that she was his mother). Perhaps this silence concerning Mary on the part of Mark and Matthew may be an indication that she did not figure prominently in the ecclesial communities and traditions from which these Gospels sprang. If so, this might explain why they used this story with its implied slight on Mary. They did not know her; they did not know any better.<sup>45</sup> And this might also explain the ease with which Mark conflates two separate traditions (one concerning "the brothers of Jesus" who are hostile towards him, and the other concerning "the mother and brothers of Jesus" without any suggestion of hostility on their part) into the one narrative (Mk 3:20-21, 31-35).<sup>46</sup> But be that as it may, what is clear is that the Evangelists did not intend their narration of this incident to have as its primary meaning Jesus' rejection of his mother and family. It is even possible that they did not intend to give any such impression, even secondarily. Rather, their primary intention may have been simply to convey the primacy of discipleship as forcefully as possible, and the idiom used had the unfortunate side effect of suggesting a snubbing of Mary on the part of Jesus, which was not intended. One is reminded here of Jesus' use of hyperbole to emphasize a point, natural enough in Jesus' time and culture, but strange to contemporary English ears: "If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26).

Luke may have been aware of this implication and he may have considered it quite mistaken. Certainly it does not fit in with the picture of Mary he gives elsewhere in his Gospel. Although he wants to use this incident to illustrate Jesus' teaching on the importance of discipleship, he also wants to avoid any implied slight on Mary. He takes a protective stance with regard to her. He may have known Mary personally in the postresurrection Church and from personal experience known that she fully deserved being numbered among the community of disciples. Or he may have merely used a tradition to this effect. But whatever his source, Luke is the champion of Mary the disciple, and throughout his Gospel, including the infancy narrative, the portrait of Mary is made consistent

<sup>44</sup> In Mk 6:3 and Mt 13:55 there is reference to Mary being the mother of Jesus, but this does not help us here.

<sup>45</sup> "The negative portrait of Mary in Mark's Gospel does not necessarily show the 'true' Mary as opposed to the obedient and believing Mary of Luke" (Brown *et al.*, *Mary in the NT* 284.)

<sup>46</sup> Brown, "Understanding Mary" 89-90; *Birth of the Messiah* 317.

with this seminal fact, viz., that she was one of the believers in the postresurrection Church.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, in recounting the incident of Mary coming to see Jesus, Luke makes several significant changes. He places it in the context of Jesus' teaching on discipleship beginning with the parable of the sower and the seed that falls on to various sorts of ground (Lk 8:4-15). This parable ends with the climactic line: "As for the part in the rich soil, this is people with a noble and generous heart who have heard the word and take it to themselves and yield a harvest through their perseverance" (v. 15). Unlike Matthew and Mark, he places this parable and Jesus's explanation *before* his account of Mary's arrival, and he presents both the telling of the parable and Mary's arrival as part of the one teaching session. Luke obviously wants the lesson of the parable to be borne in mind when he tells the story of Jesus' mother and brothers. Matthew and Mark, on the other hand, give the parable after their account of Jesus' reaction to Mary's arrival and they separate the two incidents by placing them in different settings.

Then, in actually telling the story, Luke omits the rhetorical question "Who are my mother and my brothers?" and the subsequent gesture, thus removing any implied rejection of Mary. Moreover, he amplifies the description of the disciples from "those who do the will of God" to those "who hear the word of God and put it into practice." His account reads: "His mother and brothers came looking for him, but they could not get to him because of the crowd. He was told, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to see you.' But he replied, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice'" (Lk 8:19-21). This account can be interpreted positively. The "But he replied" does not imply a strong contrast. The criterion Jesus uses to determine who are members of his family is not one based on blood relationships but solely on hearing the word of God and acting on it. In Luke's account there is no reason to think that his mother and brothers do not satisfy the criterion.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Brown makes a similar point: "I suggest. . .that the portrait of Mary in 1.38 is shaped from Luke's account of her in the ministry" (*Birth of the Messiah* 316). However, the only incident from the ministry which he gives as providing a picture of Mary which Luke can then read back into the Annunciation narrative is the scene which we are discussing here, which is common to the other two Synoptic writers. But Brown concedes that Luke thoroughly modified and edited it to suit his understanding of Mary (*ibid.* 317-18). Whence then did he get this understanding? I suggest there are only three realistic possibilities: either he knew Mary personally, or he based his understanding on the tradition which places Mary in the early Church community, or there is another tradition about Mary which does not surface explicitly in the Gospel but which is reflected in the incidents concerning Mary which Luke narrates in his Gospel.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, "Understanding Mary" 90-91; *Birth of the Messiah* 318.



Support for this conclusion can be found in the other references Luke makes to Mary in his writings. As noted already, in Acts 1:14 he lists Mary and his brethren as members of the believing community after the Resurrection. And in his infancy narrative Luke portrays Mary as a believer. The key utterance of Mary at the Annunciation sums up her character and attitude: "I am the handmaid of the Lord: let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). The idea in these words is the same as that contained in the phrase "those who hear the word of God and put it into practice." The only difference is that grammatically Mary utters it in the first person.<sup>49</sup> The phrase is Jesus' description of his disciples. By putting the same sentiments into the mouth of Mary, Luke is surely saying that she qualifies as a true disciple.

Elsewhere, too, Luke associates this idea of discipleship with Mary. At the Visitation Elizabeth praises Mary in extravagant terms: "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. . . . Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:42, 45). Here Luke brings forward Elizabeth as a witness that Mary has heard the word of God and accepted it. In other words, she is a disciple.<sup>50</sup>

In another incident parallel to the first one we considered, Luke makes the same contrast between family relationships and hearing the word of God: "Now as he was speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said, 'Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!' But he replied, 'Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it'" (Lk 11:27-28).<sup>51</sup> Once again, the emphasis in this account is on Jesus' preference for discipleship rather than family relationship. Even the woman's praise of Jesus' mother is subordinate to her intention of praising Jesus himself. In effect she is saying: "You are so great; your mother must be proud of you!" Moreover, there is again a possible suggestion that Jesus' reply is a snubbing of his mother ("Still happier. . ." or, in another translation, "Happy rather. . ."). But in the light of what we have seen Luke say elsewhere, this interpretation is unwarranted.

These two texts have important similarities. Both Elizabeth and the woman in the crowd praise Mary's physical motherhood. But then there is a further insight. Elizabeth goes on to praise Mary's believing that the word of God would be fulfilled, and Jesus praises those who hear the word of God and keep it. Both bring in the added note that *perseverance* in accepting the word of God is necessary; merely hearing it is not enough. Discipleship is not a passing fancy but a lifelong and total commitment.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Brown, "Understanding Mary" 93.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.; *Birth of the Messiah* 341-44.

<sup>52</sup> That discipleship is a radical commitment for life has plenty of support in the Gospels: e.g., Mt 8:19-22; 10:37-39; 16:24-25; 19:29; Mk 8:34-35; Lk 9:23-24, 57-62; 14:26-27; Jn 12:25-26.

Finally, we can note Luke's twice repeated "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (2:19), and "his mother kept all these things in her heart" (2:51). The parallel with "those who hear the word of God and keep it" (11:28) is obvious. Although these verses may be standard biblical reactions to manifestations of the works of God,<sup>53</sup> it is not fanciful to see in Luke's twice referring them to Mary his insistence that Jesus' description of what it means to be a disciple does in fact apply to Mary. All in all, Luke six times in his Gospel takes the notion of hearing the word of God and incorporating it into one's life and applies it to Mary. This, together with his explicit listing of Mary among the members of the early Church community in Acts, is impressive evidence that Mary is truly to be considered a disciple.

Discipleship, therefore, in Luke's understanding contains two elements: hearing the word of God (be it from the mouth of Jesus, or from one of God's messengers, or in the events of life) and incorporating that word into one's life ("keeping it," "putting it into practice," "pondering it in one's heart"). Corresponding to these two elements, we can detect the need for a divine initiative and a human response. God must first of all speak or manifest Himself in some way if the disciple is to *hear*. But equally importantly, the disciple must respond to what he has heard. The hearing of God's word must provoke a reaction in him which radically alters his life. A temporary response is not sufficient; such a person is like the seed which falls on rocky ground (Mt 13:5-6, 20-21; Lk 8:6, 13). Perseverance is necessary, and therefore the change must be a radical reorientation of life; for only if the seed falls on deeply rich soil will it yield a hundredfold increase (Mk 13:8, 23; Lk 8:8, 15). That Mary's discipleship fulfils these conditions is clear in Luke's writings and is confirmed in the Gospel of John, as we shall see shortly.

#### MARY DISCIPLE AND MOTHER

The relatively clear teaching in the Synoptics that Jesus placed greater value on discipleship than on motherhood contrasts strikingly with the strong emphasis later Marian thought has placed on Mary's divine maternity. According to Luke, Mary as disciple is more valuable in the eyes of Jesus than Mary as mother. How then to reconcile this with the clear and constant teaching of the Church which venerates Mary precisely because she is the *mother* of Jesus Christ, God and man? This question can be resolved by taking Mary's perfect discipleship as a paradigm with which to view and explain her divine maternity. This means that her motherhood should be understood in the light of her discipleship, and not vice versa. This approach will have several advantages: it will give

<sup>53</sup> Brown, "Understanding Mary" 95, n. 88; *Birth of the Messiah* 429-31.

the scriptural evidence its proper due; it will show that the Church's later teaching is quite consistent with the primacy of discipleship as understood in the Gospels; finally, it will cast fresh light on Mary's motherhood, and her dignity as mother of Jesus will be enhanced with truly Gospel values.

The link between faith and discipleship is firmly established in the Christian consciousness. Indeed, it is inconceivable that anyone should be a disciple of Christ and not have faith in him. In the Gospels faith is described in terms already familiar to us in this essay: doing the will of God (Mk 3:35), hearing the word of God and putting it into practice (Lk 8:21), and hearing the word of God and keeping it (Lk 11:28). Accepting the word of God, having faith, is thus a necessary condition of discipleship—a connection made clearly in John: "If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples" (Jn 8:31).

Mary has long been seen in Christian tradition as the "woman of faith." The early champion of Mary under this title was St. Augustine, and his eloquent testimony to Mary's faith has rung down through the ages, being taken up by successive generations of saints and thinkers right to the present day. This title amounts to much the same as calling her the "perfect disciple"; it emphasizes Mary's commitment in faith, whereas "perfect disciple" covers all that is meant by discipleship as conveyed to us in the Scriptures. Nevertheless, faith is central to any adequate understanding of discipleship.

Augustine clearly considers Mary's faith in terms of her commitment in *belief*. This is supported by Elizabeth's testimony already cited: "blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45). We are all familiar with Augustine's dictum that Mary full of faith conceived Christ first in her heart before conceiving him in her womb: "illa [Maria] fide plena et Christum prius mente quam ventre concipiens."<sup>54</sup> But we are less familiar with a further acute observation on his part. Not only does he give a priority to Mary's conception of Christ in faith, but he points out that it is precisely through her *believing* that Mary conceived him in her womb: "Maria credendo concepit sine viro."<sup>55</sup> In another sermon he makes this point very clearly: "Virgo ergo Maria non concubuit et concepit, sed credidit et concepit."<sup>56</sup> The Virgin Mary did not have intercourse and conceive; instead, she *believed* and conceived. In other words, the human act whereby she

<sup>54</sup> *Sermo* 215, 4 (PL 38, 1074).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* See also "Credidit Maria, et in ea quod credidit factum est" (*ibid.*).

<sup>56</sup> *Sermo* 233, 3, 4 (PL 38, 1114). The full text reads: "Nos per concupiscentiam carnis, ille [Christus] autem non per ipsam. Maria enim virgo sine virili amplexu, sine concupiscentiae aestu; quoniam ne pateretur hunc aestum, ideo ei dictum est, Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi. Virgo ergo Maria non concubuit et concepit, sed credidit et concepit."

conceived her Son was not an act of loving union with her husband but an act of loving faith in God. A wife surrenders in love and faith to her husband and conceives; Mary surrendered in love and faith to God and conceived.<sup>57</sup> "Let it be to me according to your word." If it is asked, what Mary *did* to conceive Christ, the answer is simply: she made an act of faith. And then "the Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:14). But we must be clear that this was not just an act of faith on a par with any one disciple's act of faith. It was also the very act whereby Mary conceived and became the mother of God.

Thus Mary's faith as a disciple "hearing the word of God and keeping it" was the cause (on her part) of her motherhood. Her maternity must be seen in the light of her discipleship. Her conceiving of Christ was from her point of view first and foremost a faith-event, and it is in viewing her as a disciple that her role in the Incarnation makes the most sense.

All this in no way denies the unique role the divine maternity plays in a Christian's appreciation of Mary. That she is the mother of God is the most glorious thing about her; it is her greatest privilege. Nothing, not even her perfect discipleship, may be permitted to detract from her sublime dignity as mother of the God-made-man, Jesus Christ. Moreover, she was predestined by God from all eternity to be His mother; and this predestination must have included her discipleship as a necessary condition, for it is inconceivable that Mary could have been the virgin mother of God conceiving by faith without also being a disciple. Thus her predestination in the mind of God to be his mother has an absolute priority over all other considerations within the mystery of Mary. In scholastic terms, her predestination to divine maternity is the final and specificative cause of all her other privileges (including her perfect discipleship). Absolutely speaking, it is ontologically the first of the causes. However, in the temporal order her faith and discipleship preceded her motherhood; they are the formal and dispositive cause, making Mary ready and able to contribute to the causality of the Incarnation (in a subordinate role, of course) by conceiving Christ in her womb through her act of faith (efficient causality).

At first sight, admitting the absolute priority of the divine maternity in the mystery of Mary may seem to conflict with putting forward Mary's perfect discipleship as the paradigm for Marian studies. In fact, there is no conflict. In the ontological order—the order of reality, the way things actually are—Mary's predestination to be the mother of God takes precedence over all else. Everything that happened to her happened

<sup>57</sup> See also "Propter cujus sanctam in virginis utero conceptionem, non concupiscentia carnis urente factam, sed fidei charitate fervente, ideo dicitur natus de Spiritu sancto et virgine Maria" (*Sermo* 214, 6; PL 38, 1069).

when and in the way it did precisely because she was destined from all eternity to be the mother of the Incarnate Word. This predestination is ontologically prior, because in a real sense it caused, or had a causal influence on, everything else that happened to her, and causes are ontologically prior to their effects.

But a paradigm does not operate in the ontological order at all. Nor is it a fundamental principle. Rather, it plays its role in the order of knowledge: it is an epistemological model, not an ontological principle. The role of a paradigm is not to indicate the origin of a causal chain in reality; its role is to provide a point of view from which to survey the whole of the mystery. Its task is to afford a key idea in the light of which the various facets of the mystery are to be explained and ordered among themselves. It has to be an *idea* of sufficient breadth and richness to generate understanding of all the other aspects that fall within the scope of the mystery. The paradigm, therefore, does not have to occupy first position in the order of reality at all; that is not its function.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the order of nature and the order of knowledge do not run in parallel lines, nor does one mirror the other. Does not St. Thomas tell us that priority in the order of knowledge is often the exact opposite of priority in the order of nature?<sup>59</sup>

Thus there is no difficulty in asserting the absolute primacy of the divine motherhood over and above the other attributes of Mary, while at the same time insisting that her perfect discipleship holds pride of place as the paradigm of Mariology. For the former concerns the order of reality; the latter concerns the order of understanding. Indeed, it is precisely in the light of her perfect discipleship that Mary's motherhood can be seen to be her crowning glory. It makes sense only in terms of a joyful self-giving and a loving receptiveness on the part of Mary. In other words, her motherhood is the elevating of her discipleship—hearing the word of God and cherishing it—to hitherto undreamed-of heights of fulfilment. The words of Jesus himself now take on a telling significance: "My mother. . . is (she) who hears the word of God and keeps it." The Word of God she hears and cherishes is not just a message from God: it is a divine Person, God's only Son, the perfect manifestation of God

<sup>58</sup> "... one should here distinguish between the basic reality of salvation as applied to Mary and the basic perspective of a Mariological treatise. Though the basic reality of Mary must be reflected in the basic notion of the Mariological treatise, the latter need not coincide fully with the former. In consequence of Mary's place in the whole plan of salvation, the basic notion can be prior at least to the basic reality and be its theoretical presupposition" (M. Schmaus, "Mariology," *Sacramentum mundi* 3 [London, 1968] 384). Though Schmaus here is speaking of the fundamental principle, what he says also applies to the paradigm.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., *In 1 Phys.* lect. 1, n. 7; *Sum. theol.* 1, 1, 2; 1, 85, 3, ad 4.

Himself. Thus to say that Mary's discipleship is a paradigm for Mariology is not the same as saying it is a fundamental principle. One cannot logically deduce Mary's divine motherhood or any other privilege from her discipleship. Rather, her discipleship is the paradigm which provides the perspective from which her attributes are to be viewed and in the light of which they are to be explained. Let St. Augustine have the final word: "Mary's relationship as mother would have been of no profit to her if she had not more joyfully borne Christ in her heart than in her body."<sup>60</sup>

It may be objected that it is too much to claim that Mary was a disciple *before* she conceived Christ. If we understand a disciple to be one who wholeheartedly follows Christ, then this is true. But it is not necessary that we understand Mary's discipleship exclusively in these terms. There is no reason to suppose that Mary did not grow in appreciation of what it means to be a disciple throughout the rest of her life. The necessary condition for discipleship is "hearing the word of God and keeping it" (Luke) or "doing the will of God" (Mark). Mary certainly fulfilled this condition at the Annunciation, and thus she merits the title "disciple." And she deserved to be called the "perfect disciple" at that time too. "Perfect disciple" is not a static term, implying that one has already reached perfection on the scale of discipleship in such a way that no further development is possible. At the Annunciation Mary was perfectly docile to the word of God and thus was perfectly a disciple as far as anyone could be at that time. But in the following years, as our Lord matured and began to preach his message, the word of God was heard with his voice, and the conditions of discipleship became increasingly connected with his mission. Mary responded perfectly to these new demands and increasingly matured in perfection until her mission reached its climax at the foot of the Cross.

#### MARY THE DISCIPLE IN THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

Just as the mystery of Mary's motherhood is not exhausted by the Annunciation but must be seen as continuing throughout her Son's life and beyond, so must her discipleship. This is brought home to us by the other scriptural references to Mary, especially those in the Gospel according to John.

The fourth Gospel was probably written to correct some attitudes and tendencies creeping into the Church at the end of the first century.<sup>61</sup> At that time the memory of the apostles ("the Twelve") was being increas-

<sup>60</sup> "Materna propinquitatis nihil Mariae profuisset, nisi felicius Christum corde quam carne gestasset" (*De sancta virginitate* 3; PL 40, 398).

<sup>61</sup> Brown, "Roles of Women" 689-90. However, there is a renewed discussion on the dating of John's Gospel: see J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London, 1976) 254-311.

ingly revered, and to counteract any possible overemphasis in this area "the fourth Gospel glorifies the disciple and never uses the term 'apostle' in the technical sense, almost as if the Evangelist wishes to remind the Christian that what is primary is not to have had a special ecclesiastical charism from God but to have followed Jesus, obedient to his word."<sup>62</sup>

Mary figures notably in two places in the Gospel according to John: at the wedding in Cana and at the foot of the Cross. In the Cana story the dialogue between Mary and Jesus is important for the light it casts on Mary's relationship with her Son. Raymond Brown sees in the words "Woman, what has this concern of yours to do with me? My hour has not yet come" an echo of the Marcan and Lucan passages we have discussed, in which no importance is attributed to family ties and even his mother has to be judged in terms of hearing the word of God and acting on it.<sup>63</sup> There seems to be some reproof here in Jesus' words, as if his mother is making her request precisely because she is his mother. Jesus corrects this assumption by referring to his "hour" of glorification and return to the Father's right hand (Jn 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). He implies that this "hour" is determined not by family considerations but solely by the will of the Father (Jn 12:27), which is the guiding rule of true discipleship. Thus "in the Cana story the dialogue between Jesus and Mary... is nothing more than another form of the tradition common to the Synoptics."<sup>64</sup>

The authority of Brown gives weight to this interpretation, and it is valuable since it relates discipleship to Mary. However, it is not entirely satisfactory.<sup>65</sup> The link with the Synoptic tradition depends entirely on the validity of the interpretation. But why give this interpretation? It is not an obvious reading of the text (although one must grant that the text is difficult). The Synoptic episode and the Cana story have nothing in common as stories, nor are they put to the same use by their respective Evangelists. The Synoptic writers have as their primary aim to give Jesus' teaching on what constitutes his true family. John's purpose in telling the Cana story, on the other hand, was quite different: "This was the first of the signs given by Jesus; it was given at Cana in Galilee. He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him" (Jn 2:11).

Moreover, Brown's interpretation casts Mary in a role that is limited to her natural motherhood. It is not until Jesus' "hour" on Calvary that she is seen as also a disciple.<sup>66</sup> But this ignores the context in which the

<sup>62</sup> Brown, "Roles of Women" 690.

<sup>63</sup> "Understanding Mary" 100.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 101. See also his briefer, and perhaps more persuasive, account in "Roles of Women" 695-98.

<sup>65</sup> For a criticism aimed at Brown's methodology, see R. Laurentin, "Bulletin sur Marie Mère du Seigneur," *RSPT* 60 (1976) 313-14.

<sup>66</sup> "Understanding Mary" 104.

Cana story is set. John recounts the episode immediately after his account of the calling of the first disciples, and he links Mary with these disciples in the opening verse of the Cana episode. "Two days later there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited" (2:1-2). But in concluding the story he says simply, "and his disciples believed in him," not mentioning Mary, perhaps because her belief in him was not aroused by the wonder he wrought but rather was already present when she made her intervention.

A further difficulty in Brown's interpretation is that it does not seem to do justice to the Evangelist's intention. Mary is obviously an important figure in the story. She cannot be put there merely to have her request rejected and to be told that her maternal status has no claims on Jesus in his public life. The fact that John introduces her as the first character in the story and calls her by the title "the mother of Jesus," which is obviously important when it occurs again in the Calvary scene, the fact that in John's Gospel she appears only at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' ministry, and the fact that Jesus' first sign was worked only in response to her intervention, all indicate that for John her role was much more important than Brown's interpretation would have us believe. If at Calvary Mary is clearly seen as both mother *and* disciple, it seems natural to suppose she is present at Cana also in this dual role. It is not necessary to see a development in Johannine understanding of Mary from the negative refusal of her maternal claims at Cana to the positive acceptance of her as a disciple at Calvary. If Brown is prepared to accept that Luke retrospectively sees Mary at the Annunciation in the light of what he knows of her during the ministry and in the postresurrection Church, why is he not prepared to allow that John does the same in viewing Mary at Cana in the light of his understanding of her at Calvary?

Brown uses a hypothesis, developed by R. T. Fortna, that an earlier "miracle" story formed the basis of the Cana episode as John recounts it and that John himself added the dialogue between Jesus and Mary to the original story even though it does not fit very well.<sup>67</sup> The hypothesis is attractive, but the question at once arises: why did John add this dialogue? He must have had a clear intention in mind. Brown sees in Jesus' words an apparent refusal to grant Mary's implicit request because she was asking it on the basis of her family ties with him. But it is difficult to see Jesus' words as a refusal in the light of the fact that he immediately grants the request. Moreover, how can Jesus' words "my hour has not

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 97-101. For this hypothesis Brown is relying on the works of Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London, 1972) 126-27, and R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge Univ., 1970).



yet come" mean what they seem to say, when Jesus' "hour" is the time when his glory is made manifest? For the whole point of the story for John is that in this incident "he manifested his glory" (Jn 2:11).

However, another more satisfactory interpretation of this dialogue is possible, which nevertheless reaches a conclusion similar to Brown's, albeit with (I think) more cogent reasons. Albert Vanhoye in a careful examination of the question "Woman, what is this to me and to thee?"<sup>68</sup> compares it with the not infrequent uses of this idiom in the OT and concludes that in all cases the expression concerns the relationship between two persons.<sup>69</sup> This relationship varies according to the context: sometimes it is a question of whether there is something which unites the two parties (e.g., Josh 22:24-25); at other times it is a question of whether there is something which divides the parties (e.g., Judg 11:12).

Thus in the Cana story, although Jesus is not refusing his mother's request nor is he reproving her, nevertheless he is telling her something about her relationship with him. He is calling into question the relationship she has had up to then with him—the familial relationship of mother and son. He is suggesting that this has now been transcended. He signals this by no longer calling her "mother" but "woman," a title which is not offensive but which nevertheless shows that Jesus no longer sees himself vis-à-vis his mother on the level of a natural family.

His very next words explain why this must now be so. Vanhoye prefers to translate the phrase not as an affirmation, "My hour has not yet come," but as an interrogation, "Has not my hour come?"<sup>70</sup> This translation is known to the Fathers and is favored by several scholars today.<sup>71</sup> Brown himself concedes that it is perfectly possible.<sup>72</sup> Vanhoye argues strongly for it.

The effect of this question is exactly the opposite to that of the affirmation; whereas the latter declares that Jesus' hour has not yet arrived, the former implies that indeed it has. And John affirms this by concluding the episode with the note that with this sign Jesus let his glory be known. The hour of Jesus, therefore, is not limited to his moment on Calvary. The "hour" begins at Cana, extends throughout the ministry whenever Jesus makes known his glory and power through the working of a "sign," and reaches its climax at Calvary, where his glory is fully

<sup>68</sup> A. Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique et exégèse de Cana (Jn 2, 4)," *Biblica* 55 (1974) 157-67.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 162-64.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 159-62.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 159, n. 1.

<sup>72</sup> R. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* 1 (Anchor Bible 29; New York, 1966) 99; "Understanding Mary" 97, n. 3.

manifested in the death and resurrection.<sup>73</sup> Thus in the Cana dialogue Jesus is telling Mary that the former mother-son relationship is now transformed into a new relationship because his hour is now beginning with the sign which he will work in response to her intervention.

In Jesus' reply he is asserting his independence from all merely human influence—a constant theme in John's Gospel. In doing this work of his Father, Jesus is subject only to Him; not even his mother can influence what he does. This independence is emphasized by Jesus' use of the personal possessive pronoun "my hour," which is stressed in the original Greek text by being placed at the end of the phrase.<sup>74</sup> Nowhere else in the Gospel does Jesus refer to "my hour" in this way.

The fact that Mary does speak again is evidence that she does not feel rebuffed and that there has not been a rupture in her relationship with Jesus. Her very next words show that she understands what he is saying and that she accepts the new relationship.<sup>75</sup> She no longer addresses Jesus but speaks to the waiters, suggesting that they should do whatever Jesus tells them. She does not specify what should be done. It is all up to Jesus. The initiative belongs to him.

But what is this new relationship? Vanhoye (together with Brown) finds a comparison with the Synoptic tradition, particularly Mk 3:31-35 (which we have discussed above), very instructive.<sup>76</sup> Jesus' family ties are questioned and replaced with ties of discipleship. I prefer rather to see the similarity with Luke's version of the same episode and see John doing what Luke did, i.e., including Mary among the disciples understood as those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.

In support of this contention three points can be made. First, John places the Cana story immediately after his account of the calling of the first disciples. This does not mean that Mary joined that select band of followers; the calling of the disciples and the wedding at Cana are distinct episodes. But it is not unreasonable to see an association in thought from one episode to the next. The temporal indications carefully listed by John naturally do make the connection. (On the first day Jesus calls two of the Baptist's disciples, "early next morning" he calls Simon Peter, "the next day" he calls Philip and Nathanael, "two days later" there is the wedding

<sup>73</sup> Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique" 161-62. For scholarly discussion of Jesus' "hour," see R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John* 1 (London, 1968) 328-31; Brown, *John* 99-100, and Appendix 1 (11) 517-18; G. Ferraro, *L'"ora" di Cristo nel Quarto Vangelo* (Rome, 1974).

<sup>74</sup> Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique" 164.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 164-65. "Mary's persistence in face of refusal is a difficulty" for Brown (*John* 102) only if Jesus has in fact refused her. But the difficulty disappears in our interpretation, because there is no refusal.

<sup>76</sup> Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique" 164.

at Cana.) Therefore, if we grant an association of ideas based on the context, it is not too fanciful to see in Jesus' words a declaration that Mary should enter into a relationship of discipleship (a "calling"?) based on receptivity to the word of the Father manifested in Jesus—a relationship to which the other disciples are called also and which is the condition of their membership in the special group. This conclusion is reinforced by John's linking of Mary with the other disciples in the opening words of the Cana story.

Second, Jesus' calling Mary "woman" rather than "mother" signals a change in their relationship and calls to mind the only other occasion in the Gospels where she is called in this fashion, viz., when Jesus speaks to her on Calvary. There she is clearly seen as a disciple (in the fundamental sense) and she is closely linked with the Beloved Disciple.

Third, Mary's response to Jesus' words in the Cana episode shows her own understanding of the new relationship. "Do whatever he tells you." She is telling the servants to be at the disposal of Jesus, a sentiment which she herself shares inasmuch as she does not give any instructions herself but disposes herself to see that his wishes are carried out. She is not excluding herself from the command to do whatever Jesus says; rather, she is fulfilling the Gospel prescription of what is necessary in order to be a true disciple. In these words of Mary there is also a hint of her motherhood with regard to the disciples, which Jesus will declare on Calvary. In telling the servants to follow Jesus' commands, she is arousing in them an attitude of discipleship.

Thus a good case can be made for interpreting the Cana scene (at least as regards Mary) in terms of her discipleship. John has done the same as Luke and sees Mary no longer simply as his mother but also as a disciple. It is too strong to maintain that the relationship of mother and son is broken or even replaced; it is transcended. It is transformed into the higher relationship of discipleship. Even as mother, Mary always sought what was best for him; she was at his service in that sense. Now that her motherhood has been taken up into her discipleship, she still seeks to serve him, but under new conditions. She now recognizes his independence of her and the initiative belongs to him. Her maternal solicitude for his welfare is thus perfectly compatible with the disciple's readiness to hear and cherish his word. That John sees Mary as both mother and disciple, and that the latter does not displace the former, is indicated by the fact that he always refers to her as "the mother of Jesus" (twice in the Cana story and three times in the Calvary scene, where a new role is very clearly given to Mary).

If this interpretation is correct, John is providing a concrete illustration of what Jesus taught his disciples in the Last Supper discourse: "whatever

you ask for in my name I will do" (Jn 14:13). John obviously thinks this is so important that he puts the same idea four more times on the lips of Jesus during the same discourse (15:7, 16; 16:24, 26; see also 1 Jn 3:22). At Cana, if Mary is there as not only mother but also disciple, we see her putting this teaching into practice and Jesus fulfilling his promise. He made the promise to his *disciples*; therefore Mary must also have been a disciple. A strong parallel with the Synoptic tradition also thus emerges, for repeatedly in the Synoptic Gospels we find Jesus' injunctions to pray and his promise that the prayer will be granted.<sup>77</sup>

Let us now look at the second appearance of Mary in John's Gospel in more detail. The Calvary scene is of supreme importance for John: it is pregnant with symbolism and keen theological insight. Many commentators have recognized a very close connection between the Cana episode and the Calvary scene; but rather than seeing Cana in contrast to Calvary, all indications are that they should be viewed as complementary to each other:<sup>78</sup> Cana anticipates what is accomplished at Calvary.

At the foot of the Cross John places two important characters whom he introduces not by name but by description: the mother of Jesus, and the disciple whom Jesus loved. The significance of this should not be missed. None of the other three Evangelists mentions the presence of either of these two important persons, and this raises problems concerning the historicity of the incident.<sup>79</sup> However, for our purposes the theological significance of John's placing them on Calvary is much more important; for here the "hour" of Jesus comes to a climax, the "hour" in which his work reaches its fulfilment and he is to be definitively glorified. The fact that he introduces Mary into the scene together with the Beloved Disciple is a strong invitation for us to ponder in depth its significance to the best of our ability.

"The disciple whom Jesus loved" has a symbolic importance in John's Gospel far greater than any historical significance he might have had. Who he was historically and whether he is to be identified with the disciple called John, one of the Twelve, is still being debated in scholarly circles.<sup>80</sup> What concerns us here is that he is portrayed in the fourth Gospel as being the *ideal disciple*. He is the close companion of Jesus

<sup>77</sup> E.g., Mt 7:7-11; 18:19; Mk 11:24; Lk 11:9-13; 18:1-8. For a concrete example of the disciples taking Jesus' words to heart and obtaining what they asked for, see Acts 3:1-16; 4:10.

<sup>78</sup> Vanhoye, "Interrogation johannique" 166.

<sup>79</sup> For differing views on the historicity of this incident, see, e.g., Brown, *John* 904-7, 922-27, and M. E. Boismard and A. Lamouille, *L'Évangile de Jean, Synopse 3* (Paris, 1977).

<sup>80</sup> Brown, *John* 1, lxxxvii-cii; J. McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (London, 1975) 351-60. For a lively study proposing identification with an unknown John, who was a priest in Jerusalem and converted by Jesus, see J. Colson, *L'Enigme du disciple que Jésus aimait* (Paris, 1969).

and had a special place in his affections. Jesus loved him and we are told elsewhere that Jesus' love is reserved for those who keep his commandments (Jn 14:21, 23), i.e., those who hear the word of God and keep it. Thus he is put forward as the model for all other disciples to follow. In bringing him into the scene of Christ's triumph on the Cross, and immediately afterwards as one of the first witnesses to the Resurrection (Jn 20:1-10), the Evangelist portrays him as the recipient of Jesus' provisions for the continuation of his mission now that his work on earth is completed. Jesus' mission is entrusted to his disciples in the person of the ideal disciple. Jesus is now to live on in his Church, in his disciples.

In this crucial scene the themes of motherhood and discipleship are tightly interwoven. This is emphasized by the Evangelist's use of descriptive titles instead of proper names: the *mother* of Jesus and the *disciple* whom Jesus loved. John writes: "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother.' And from that moment the disciple took her into his care" (Jn 19:25-27).

Jesus proclaims that Mary and the disciple are now related as mother and son. This relationship obviously cannot be a biological one. Nevertheless, the very words suggest a unity of "nature." A mother must be of the same nature as her offspring. Mary's "son" here is a disciple; therefore she too must be a disciple. The disciple whom Jesus loved has his character fixed throughout the Gospel: he is the ideal disciple, the confidant and favored friend of Jesus. His role does not develop. Mary, on the other hand, does receive a new role. She is the mother of Jesus and she also becomes a disciple. This is hinted at Cana, but it is only when she appears again at the climax of Jesus' mission that this is formally ratified. Though she is still his mother, she is also clearly identified as one of the disciples, for she is mother of the ideal disciple. Her biological motherhood is transcended and its true nature stands revealed in terms of discipleship. The Beloved Disciple stands there as the ideal. Mary as his mother must be like him in his spiritual "nature" because he is her son. And so she too like him must be a model disciple. Thus what Luke affirmed in his Annunciation narrative at the beginning of his Gospel, John affirms in the Crucifixion narrative at the end of his.

This interpretation receives an important confirmation in the verses immediately following which describe the death of Jesus. In v. 30 we read: "After Jesus had taken the vinegar he said, 'It is accomplished'; and bowing his head he gave up his spirit." The phrase translated here as "he gave up his spirit" is an unusual one in Greek (*paredōken to pneuma*),

and the Evangelist seems to have intentionally departed from the common expression signifying "to breathe one's last" found in the Synoptic tradition at this point (cf. Mk 15:37; Mt 27:50; Lk 23:46). David Stanley sees in this choice of phrase an indication that in the Evangelist's view "Jesus brings his mission to its final, successful conclusion by breathing forth the Holy Spirit upon our Lady and the beloved disciple, who represents all faithful Christians."<sup>81</sup> Earlier in his Gospel John had said that "there was no Spirit yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (7:39). But on Calvary his moment of glory had come and it was then time to breathe forth the Spirit.

This idea is reinforced by the ensuing verses in which John describes the piercing of Jesus' side, from which water and blood flowed. John himself ascribes living water to Christ as its source and links it clearly with the Holy Spirit: "On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood there and cried out: 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me!' As Scripture says, 'From his breast shall flow fountains of living water.' He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for there was no Spirit as yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified."<sup>82</sup> On Calvary Mary and the Beloved Disciple are witnesses to this breathing out of the Spirit and outpouring of water. They are thus pictured as receiving the first outpouring of the Spirit on the newly constituted Church.<sup>83</sup>

John is here making the same point as Luke makes in a different context. In Acts 1:14 he is at pains to mention that Mary is a member of the postresurrection community of believers who joined together in continuous prayer. And it is the same community (including Mary) which receives the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the birthday of the infant Church (Acts 2:1-41). On Calvary Mary and the ideal disciple (representing all true Christians) receive the Spirit from the dying Christ; at Pentecost Mary and the community of disciples receive the Spirit in tongues of fire.<sup>84</sup> Theologically the same point is made: Mary is at one with the Spirit-filled disciples.

#### MARY AND THE CHURCH

Just as Mary's motherhood of Jesus himself is to be interpreted in terms of her faith and discipleship, so too must her motherhood in the

<sup>81</sup> D. M. Stanley, S.J., *A Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago, 1967) 105.

<sup>82</sup> Jn 7:37-39; see also the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jn 4:5-16.

<sup>83</sup> F. M. Braun, O.P., *Mother of God's People* (New York, 1967) 113-17; R. Laurentin, "Esprit Saint et théologie mariale," *NRT* 89 (1967) 37.

<sup>84</sup> Braun, *Mother of God's People* 117-19. Note, however, that Braun also indicates points of dissimilarity between the Johannine and Lucan accounts of the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Church be interpreted in terms of discipleship. Those whom she brings forth in the Church are disciples. And as such she must be a disciple herself. She is within the Church, a disciple among the disciples. Whatever the title "Mother of the Church" might mean, it cannot be interpreted as meaning that Mary is outside the Church, distinct from it as a mother is distinct from her offspring as their cause. Rather, she must be seen in the same way as a mother is seen as part of her family.<sup>85</sup>

However, the understanding of Mary in a personal role as spiritual mother of all Christians is a relatively late development in theology.<sup>86</sup> We shall content ourselves with seeing Mary's relationship to the Church as understood from the earliest times. In the Johannine account of the Crucifixion which we have been considering, there is no doubt that she is a symbolic figure (no matter what we think of the historical question). The symbolism is not clear, and the Evangelist's own intention may have been quite complex without any clear distinction among the various threads. However, it seems safe enough to say that he sees Mary as a figure for the Church made up of Jesus' disciples. The scene is evocative of themes in the OT and in the Book of Revelation. The figure of Mary suffering at the torment of her Son calls to mind the OT image of Israel as a woman in suffering. This torment is likened to the pains of childbirth (Isa 26:17-18; 66:7; Mic 4:9-10), and the image is taken up by John himself in his Gospel: "A woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child, she forgets the suffering in her joy that a man has been born into the world" (Jn 16:21). We find the image occurring again in the Book of Revelation: "Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman adorned with the sun, and standing upon the moon, and with the twelve stars on her head for a crown. She was pregnant and in labor, crying aloud in the pangs of childbirth" (Rev 12:1-2). It is now generally agreed that the Book of Revelation witnesses to some of the thought patterns and themes of the Johannine school from which the fourth Gospel emerged;<sup>87</sup> so we may legitimately link the pregnant suffering woman in Revelation with the figure of the suffering mother of Jesus on Calvary.

The woman in Revelation is a symbol of the people of God.<sup>88</sup> The

<sup>85</sup> Testimony to Orthodox misgivings about the title "Mother of the Church" is given by Alexis Kniazeff, "Mater, Advocata, Testis," *Maison-Dieu* 121 (1975) 108-13. Paul VI carefully explains what the title means and what it does not mean; see his discourse at the closing of the third session of Vatican II (*L'Oss. Rom.*, Nov. 22, 1964); also allocution of Feb. 2, 1965 (*L'Oss. Rom.*, Feb. 3, 1965).

<sup>86</sup> Brown, *John* 2, 924-25.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 107; also McHugh, *Mother of Jesus* 356-60.

<sup>88</sup> F. Montagnini, "Le 'signe' d'Apocalypse 12 à la lumière de la christologie du Nouveau Testament," *NRT* 89 (1967) 401-16; B. J. Le Frois, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun* (Rome, 1954); Brown, *John* 1, 108; McHugh, *Mother of Jesus* 404-8.

vision in chapter 12 tells of the enmity between the woman and the "huge red dragon," a drama which was foreshadowed in Gen 3:15, where enmity was declared between "the woman" and the serpent, between the serpent's offspring and the offspring of the woman. The "great dragon" is explicitly identified with "the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had deceived all the world" (Rev 12:9), thus making the allusion to Genesis all the more secure.

The woman in Revelation 12 also evokes the symbol of Israel as the woman suffering in childbirth. The image suggests that the Messiah himself will be born of the chosen people, Israel (Isa 66:7). Moreover, the new Israel, the people of the Messianic age, will claim the faithful ones of Israel as their mother (Isa 49:18-23; 54:1; 66:7-14). Although in the time of Isaiah Israel has already conceived this messianic offspring and is suffering labor pains, the actual birth will take place in the future (Isa 26:17-18). The prophet Micah calls the woman in labor the "daughter of Zion" (Mic 4:10), and this naturally calls to mind the other prophetic uses of the title, where Israel is called to rejoice at the coming of the Messiah and the messianic age (Zeph 3:14-17; Zech 9:9).

Thus the woman in Revelation, seen with this wealth of OT imagery behind it, symbolizes the people of God to whom the Messiah belongs. But she is also the mother of many other children, against whom the devil rages, and who are to be identified with "all who obey God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus" (Rev 12:17), i.e., the disciples of Jesus. Thus the woman is a symbol for the new people of God also, the community of disciples, the heirs to the rewards of the messianic age.

Although the primary symbolism of this mysterious figure undoubtedly points to the chosen people of God of both the old and new dispensations, all reference to Mary is not thereby excluded. "Often in the Bible collective figures are based on historical ones. Thus, the fact that the woman represents the people of God would not at all preclude a reference to an individual woman who is the basis of the symbolism."<sup>89</sup> Since the woman is presented as the mother of the Messiah, it is not unreasonable to see Mary in the symbol too. On Calvary Mary is given the ideal disciple as her son; in other words, she is given the role of mother in Jesus' new family of disciples. In the postresurrection plan the Church is entrusted with the task of winning new disciples for the Lord (cf. Mt 28:19-20 and parallels). This task is symbolized by the visionary figure of the woman in Revelation, but it is also symbolized concretely in the figure of Mary on Calvary, who is confirmed in her role as mother. But this is not to say that Mary is thereby mother of the Church. Rather, she stands there as

<sup>89</sup> Brown, *John* 1, 108; Montagnini, "Le 'signe' d'Apocalypse 12" 409, 414-15; R. E. Murphy, O.Carm., "An Allusion to Mary in the Apocalypse", *TS* 10 (1949) 565-73.



a symbol for the Church herself, who is after all known as "Mother Church."<sup>90</sup>

And Mary is peculiarly fitted for this role. The Church is a mother in the way she brings forth new disciples for Christ in faith. The Church's mission is to "give flesh to the Word," i.e., to make Christ incarnate among men. It is her task to make Christ alive in the world by communicating her faith to men. And it precisely inasmuch as they share the faith of the Church that they are disciples of Christ. The Church proclaims the word of God which the disciples hear, and she provides the means whereby they can keep it. The faith of the Church is that which makes her the spotless spouse of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2), and it is her steadfast adherence to Christ in faith which makes her the indefectible witness to the salvation wrought for all men by the sacrifice on Calvary.

As we saw earlier, Mary's faith is the key to a proper understanding of her motherhood. Through her faith she conceived Jesus the God-man, and in faith she supported him throughout his ministry from Cana to Calvary. Her faith led her to hear the word of God and keep it, treasuring and pondering it in her heart. She is the perfect disciple. The fourth Evangelist cites the testimony of the Beloved Disciple as an eyewitness report on the events of Calvary: "This is the evidence of one who saw it—trustworthy evidence, and he knows he speaks the truth—and he gives it so that you may believe as well" (Jn 19:35).<sup>91</sup> But Mary was in an equally good position to witness these same events. So she too is a witness to the saving power of God. She is in a privileged position to hand on the faith she has received. The close union of Mary and the Beloved Disciple on Calvary—united as mother and son, perfect disciple and ideal disciple—is verified at another level: both by their presence on Calvary received an outpouring of the Spirit and were constituted witnesses to the "hour" of Jesus, and thereby were charged with the mission of making others "believe as well." Thus Mary through her faithful discipleship is pre-eminently a figure of the Church herself, charged with the mission of proclaiming the Good News to all creation (Mk 16:16) and making disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19).

<sup>90</sup> For the rich tradition behind this title, see J. C. Plumpe, *Mater ecclesia* (Washington, D.C., 1944). For the relation of Mary and the Church, see Y. Congar, O.P., "Marie et l'église dans la pensée patristique," *RSPT* 38 (1954) 3-38; H. Lennerz, "Maria-ecclesia," *Greg* 35 (1954) 90-98.

<sup>91</sup> There can be little doubt that the eyewitness is the Beloved Disciple, for he is the "one who saw it"; no other male disciple is mentioned in this scene. Moreover, in a parallel announcement of authenticity (Jn 21:24) the witness is clearly identified as being "the disciple Jesus loved."

## MARY THE BLESSED VIRGIN

The tradition of the Church has constantly hailed Mary not only as the Mother of God but also as the Blessed Virgin.<sup>92</sup> It remains now to examine Mary's virginity in the light of our paradigm, her discipleship.

At the conclusion of an ecumenical investigation of Mary as she appears in the NT, the editors write:

... in the NT and in second-century literature the mother of Jesus was pictured in ways that were not uniform and, in some cases, not harmonious. . . . Nevertheless, we were able to trace some lines of development which were increasingly positive in portraying Mary as a disciple par excellence and as the virgin.<sup>93</sup>

For a study which used a very strict historico-critical method, preferring to doubt rather than give the benefit of doubt, this conclusion is noteworthy and encourages us to see a connection between her discipleship and virginity.

The topic of the virginal conception of Jesus has received a great deal of attention of late.<sup>94</sup> The discussion has focused on the problem of establishing the historicity of the doctrine in Scripture, and although I personally am chary of overemphasizing the symbolic and theological character of the Gospels to the detriment of their historicity, nevertheless here I am concerned with the theological meaning of Our Lady's virginity rather than with its historicity. I take the latter for granted, though I am well aware of the problems as revealed in the recent literature.

As we concluded above, the Gospel notion of discipleship included two elements: the divine initiative in "speaking the word," and the disciple's response in hearing and incorporating it into his life. The question before us now is, what light does this paradigm throw on our understanding of Mary's virginity?

<sup>92</sup> For a good account of the teaching of the Fathers on Mary's virginity, see Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., "Mary in Western Patristic Thought," in Carol, *Mariology* 1 (Milwaukee, 1955) 117-32; and "Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought," *ibid.* 2, 100-116; Philip Donnelly, "The Perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God," Section 2, *ibid.* 264-96.

<sup>93</sup> Brown *et al.*, *Mary in the NT* 294.

<sup>94</sup> See the bibliographies supplied by René Laurentin, "Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie," *RSPT* 62 (1978) 268-72; Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., "Theology on the Virgin Mary: 1966-1975," *TS* 37 (1976) 265-72. Of particular interest are *Marian Studies* 24 (1973); *TS* 33 (1972) 3-34; J. Galot, S.J., "La virginité de Marie et la naissance de Jésus," *NRT* 82 (1960) 449-69; H.-M. Diepen, "La virginité de Marie 'signe du Verbe naissant,'" *RevThom* 60 (1960) 425-28; J. Galot, S.J., "La conception virginale du Christ," *Greg* 49 (1968) 637-66; R. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (Paramus, N.J., 1973). On the possible origin of the infancy narratives, see P. Grelot, "La naissance d'Isaac et celle de Jésus: Sur une interprétation 'mythologique' de la conception virginale," *NRT* 94 (1972) 462-87, 561-85, and the comments of A. M. Dubarle, O.P., "La conception virginale et la citation d'Is. VII, 14 dans l'évangile de Matthieu," *RB* 85 (1978) 373-78.

In the Gospels Matthew and Luke clearly teach the virginal conception of Jesus.<sup>95</sup> At the Annunciation God takes the initiative. The word of God that Mary hears is first of all conveyed to her in the message of the angel (Lk 1:26–38). But this word does not remain on the level of a spoken utterance. Once Mary accepts what God is saying to her, the very Word of God Himself, God's only Son, becomes incarnate in her virginal womb. Mary's response is certainly that of a disciple hearing the word of God and cherishing it. What is the significance of the fact that she was also a virgin?

Scholars in recent years have come to realize that in the Christian consciousness recognition of Jesus' dignity as Son of God began by reflection on the Resurrection. It is first of all the Resurrection which manifests Jesus as Son of God and possessor of the Spirit (Acts 13:33–37; Rom 1:4). Then later it was seen that this was manifested also before the Passion (at the Transfiguration) and even at the beginning of the public ministry (Jesus' baptism in the Jordan). Paul pushes it back further to Jesus' birth when he declares that Christ was already Son of God when he was "born of a woman, born a subject of the law" (Gal 4:4). Finally, Christian reflection saw in the virginal conception a sign that Jesus was truly Son of God.<sup>96</sup>

The early Fathers continued this reflection and saw in Mary's virginity a God-given sign of the Incarnation.<sup>97</sup> That Jesus came from God is attested by the fact that Mary was a virgin in conceiving him; her virginity showed that he had no human father.<sup>98</sup> Jesus himself acknowledged only one father, his Father in heaven. His mission was to reveal to men that God was a living Father and that he was God's only-begotten Son. The divine fatherhood was revealed in the intense personal relationship he enjoyed with his Father. His divine sonship was revealed by the fact that he was begotten through the power of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary. There was no human father to cloud the issue. The virginal conception is thus an effective symbol of his divine sonship.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Growing scholarly opinion sees an allusion to the virginal conception in Jn 1:13. In favor of a reading of this verse in the singular and thus of an allusion to Christ's conception, see J. Galot, S.J., *Etre né de Dieu, Jean 1.13* (Rome, 1969); M. E. Boismard and A. Lamouille, *L'Évangile de Jean, Synopse 3* (Paris, 1977) 76; I. de la Potterie, *De matre Jesu in quarto evangelio* (Rome, 1976 [ad usum auditorum tantum]); McHugh, *Mother of Jesus* 255–65. Against the proposed reading, see Brown, *John* 1, 11–12; *Birth of the Messiah*, App. IV, 520–21; Schnackenburg, *Gospel of John* 1, 264–65.

<sup>96</sup> Dubarle, "La conception virginale" 374; Brown *et al.*, *Mary in the NT* 117–19.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Burghardt, "Mary in Western Patristic Thought" 118–19; Laurentin, "Foi et mythe" 292.

<sup>98</sup> E.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3, 26, 2.

<sup>99</sup> J. P. Kenny, S.J., "Was Mary in Fact a Virgin?" *Australasian Catholic Record* 56 (1979) 297.

St. Justin was one of the earliest witnesses to Mary's virginity, and a point in his polemic against the pagans, whose poets portrayed Jupiter as approaching women with carnal lust in mind, has relevance today.<sup>100</sup> Although no one today seriously thinks of God in those terms, nevertheless those who prefer to see Jesus' identification with humanity in terms of his having a human father should reflect on the effect this idea has on their understanding of God. Mary's virginal conception attests to the omnipotence and transcendence of God, who does not need to work through human agency or in human ways to achieve His effects.<sup>101</sup>

Mary conceived Christ "through the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:18), who overshadowed her (Lk 1:35). The Holy Spirit is the power of God and the Incarnation was accomplished through Him. But this does not mean that He was the "father" of Christ. It would also be wrong to think that He played the part of Mary's husband. The insistence that Mary was a virgin removes any pagan suggestion that Jesus' origin was through any sexual activity on the part of Mary—even with "God." Moreover, the idea that the Spirit was the "husband" of Mary betrays a misunderstanding of the whole situation. (Even to call Mary his "spouse"<sup>102</sup> requires careful understanding.) These terms suggest that the conception of Christ was the result of a partnership between Mary and the Holy Spirit analogous to that of a wife and husband in any ordinary conception. Rather, their relationship was of a totally different order: that of God and the creature. The Holy Spirit is the *ruah Yahweh*, forming the creation out of chaos (Gen 1:2); He is the very breath of God bringing life to what is dead (Ezek 37:5-6, 9). He works from within, *ex intimo*. When from the impulse of the Spirit we cry "Abba! Father!" the Spirit is in our hearts (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). When the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, Mary was totally at His disposal, as the creature is to the Creator. He worked within her, making her conceive Christ, in a fashion no created agency could rival. In the scholastic phrase of Grignion de Montfort, He "reduced her fecundity to act."<sup>103</sup> Of course, Mary was not totally passive in receiving His influence: she freely consented to His action within her. But even her "fiat" was the result of a prompting of the Spirit within her. Just as our cry "Abba! Father!" arises from an impulse of the Spirit but

<sup>100</sup> Justin, *Apologia* 1, 33; see Burghardt, "Mary in Western Patristic Thought" 118.

<sup>101</sup> "If one asks why Jesus should have been virginally conceived, the answer is not that an earthly father would have been some sort of unwelcome rival to the heavenly Father of the pre-existent Logos. Nor is it that conception in the course of marriage would have been unworthy of the eternal Son of God. The reason is the transparency with which the virginal conception and birth lets the creative power of God and his sole initiative in the work of salvation shine through. It is occasioned by no human deed" (Schmaus, "Mariology," *Sacramentum mundi* 3, 377).

<sup>102</sup> Paul VI, *Marialis cultus* 26.

<sup>103</sup> L. M. Grignion de Montfort, *Treatise on the True Devotion* 21.

is nevertheless *our* cry as sons and daughters, so too was Mary's "fiat" her own personal consent given under inspiration of the Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit, far from being simply a partner in the conception of Jesus, is in fact the transcendent cause who inspires Mary to play her part in consenting to motherhood and also accomplishes within her the motherhood to which she has consented.<sup>104</sup>

The virginal conception shows not only the initiative of God in the work of salvation; it also shows its completely gratuitous nature. There was no necessity present, such as we find with the physical laws of nature. The Incarnation was a complete gift from God. "Neither cosmos with its hoarded treasure of riches nor mankind with its creative genius and technical prowess can lay claim to Jesus or conjure him up from its own resources. He comes as gift or he does not come at all."<sup>105</sup>

The implications of the virginal conception go deeply into the Christological mystery. Mary's virginity is also a sign of the transcendence of Christ with regard to history.<sup>106</sup> Although Christ's conception in the womb of Mary is a fact of history, the way in which it was accomplished reveals his independence of the limitations of history. That it was a conception shows that it was historical; that it was a virginal conception shows an independence of human history. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4). Mary was thus the place in which the Son of God entered human history. But she was also a virgin, and Jesus' origin was not through the ordinary historically conditioned act of intercourse between spouses: it was accomplished through an intervention from outside the ordinary course of human events and by a mode of causality beyond the physical categories that operate in our world. "In the beginning the Word already was. . .and the Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:1, 14). "His state was divine, yet He did not cling to His equality with God, but emptied Himself. . .and became as men are" (Phil 2:6-7; also Col 1:17). Jesus is the Lord of history. He is the center, the focal point: everything before and after his appearance in history is now to be seen in reference to him. God "has let us know the mystery of His purpose. . .that He would bring everything together under Christ as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth" (Eph 1:9, 10). His death and glorious resurrection definitively established Jesus as Lord of history, but his mastery over creation did not begin then. It was already present in his very mode of becoming man.

A further comparison with our Lord's resurrection is possible. A strand

<sup>104</sup> Laurentin, "Esprit Saint et théologie mariale" 26-42.

<sup>105</sup> Kenny, "Was Mary in Fact a Virgin?" 298.

<sup>106</sup> Laurentin, "Foi et mythe" 292.

of early tradition compares Jesus' birth from the womb of Mary (*virginitas in partu*) to his emergence from the tomb in the Resurrection. Aspects of this tradition are unsound (e.g., exits and entrances through "closed doors");<sup>107</sup> speculation on how the virginal conception-birth and the Resurrection were accomplished is a fruitless theological exercise. But the Resurrection does suggest a more fruitful parallel. Both the virginal conception and the Resurrection heralded the beginning of new life. By being conceived in the womb of the Virgin, the Son of the Father began a new life as man; by the resurrection from the grave this man rose to a new life of glory as Son of the Father. Both transcended human agency; neither was accomplished by purely human means. Both, therefore, were manifestations of the divine power and initiative.

But the parallel must not be forced. The virginal conception was not a "mini-resurrection." The Resurrection is a unique event in salvation history. Christ died only once, he cannot die any more (Rom 6:8-9); nor is Christ's taking human form to be confused with his definitive status as the glorified Son of God. Rather, the virginal conception is a counterbalance to the Resurrection, an illustration of the first half of the dynamic of the great Christological hymn in the letter to the Philippians (2:6-11). According to the great plan of salvation, the Son of God descended from the heights of divinity and took on the status of men in the womb of the Virgin; he was then exalted to the heights of glory at the right hand of the Father. Both parts of the dynamic were accomplished by the saving power of God. The Resurrection is the definitive sign of God's power and glory; the virginal conception was the prelude and also a sign of the same power and glory. What was shown in the beginning was shown again in even more glorious fashion at the end.

Let us now turn from God's initiative and consider the second element in the Gospel understanding of discipleship: the response of the disciple to the hearing of God's word. We have already discussed how Mary gave her consent under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and how her "fiat" was the act on her part whereby she became a mother. This consent was the response of a virgin to the word of God; it was also the response of a disciple.

Virginitas, considered negatively as abstention from sexual activity, has no claims to superiority over sexual union (as found in marriage). Male and female are naturally made for each other (Gen 2:20-24); virginitas as a state of denial of this union is in this sense "unnatural." But virginitas

<sup>107</sup> K. Rahner, S.J., "Virginitas in partu," *Theological Investigations* 4 (London, 1966) 137, 151. This essay contains a valuable account of the patristic witnesses to this doctrine. See also J. C. Plumpe, "Some Little-known Early Witnesses to Mary's *Virginitas in partu*," *TS* 9 (1948) 567-77; A. C. Clarke, "The Virgin Birth: A Theological Reappraisal," *TS* 34 (1973) 576-93.

can also be considered positively, as a readiness for total commitment to another person. The virgin in this sense is one who has not dissipated himself or herself with temporary liaisons but has maintained a personal integrity to be given totally to another person. Virginité is thus not simply a matter of bodily integrity; rather, bodily integrity is a sign of the personal integrity that the virgin presents to the beloved to whom he or she totally commits himself/herself. Virginité is thus a gift of the whole self. It must not be viewed in isolation as an autonomous state of life. It is a prelude to the intimacy between persons that finds its natural expression in marriage. The virgin holds herself together so that she can give her complete self to another. Virginité in the natural order of things is a temporary state that should give way to personal commitment to another person. Virginité is made for fecundity in union with another.<sup>108</sup>

Virginité's orientation towards "the other," however, does not mean that it must find its fulfilment in just one other human person. Many single persons find great satisfaction in their commitment to the service of other men and women, particularly to those who are less fortunate than themselves. And in a religious context virginité takes on a transcendent value. It is a total orientation of the person towards another, but that other is not a human person but God Himself. Religious virginité, then, is the total gift of self to God, and its sign is the refraining from sexual intimacy with any human person, since such intimacy involves a giving of self to someone other than God.

Mary is thus a model of virginité. At the Annunciation she gave the perfect virginal response to the message of the angel: "I am the handmaid of the Lord: let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). By calling herself the handmaid of the Lord, Mary indicated her total availability to the wishes of her Lord. She made a gift of herself to Him. She held nothing back and her gift lacked nothing of what could be given.<sup>109</sup> Since she was a virgin, she had not given herself to any other person (even though she was betrothed to Joseph). She had not dissipated herself by any other commitments; she had maintained a personal integrity so that her gift of herself could be total and unreserved, having lost no part of herself through prior commitments.

Her virginité was also fruitful. Placing herself at her Lord's disposal, she accepted what He proposed: that His Son should take flesh in her womb and that she should be his mother. Her virginité thus flowered into maternity. It did not condemn her to sterility; instead, it opened the way to the most marvelous fecundity, for she was destined to be not only the mother of Christ, the first-born of all creation (Col 1:15), but also the

<sup>108</sup> Laurentin, "Marie et l'anthropologie chrétienne" 493.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 492; Laurentin, "Foi et mythe" 303-4.

mother of all those who were born again to new life in him (Jn 3:3; 1 Jn 5:11). Her virginity is thus inextricably linked with her maternity. There is really no paradox here, for virginity rightly considered is but a prelude to fecundity.

Since her commitment was total, it involved not only all that Mary had been and was at the time of the Annunciation, but also it extended into the future. Her consent to God was not temporally conditioned with an inbuilt time limit—a “yes, for now!” In accepting motherhood of the Son of the Most High, she was committing herself to something irrevocable. There could be no going back on her commitment; she could not gainsay her gift of self. For in accepting motherhood, she was accepting something that could not be reversed. Once she became mother of Christ, he could never be other than her Son. This is the significance of Mary’s perpetual virginity, her *virginitas post partum*. It symbolizes her total commitment to God and her continuing acceptance of the role He offered her: the motherhood of her Son and of all who share sonship with him. Henceforward she is to be hailed as the Blessed Mary Ever Virgin.

Thus Mary’s virginity can be summed up as being the attitude of one who heard the word of God and surrendered herself to it unconditionally and for all time. In other words, it is the attitude of a perfect disciple.

However, Mary’s virginity must be seen not merely in terms of her personal response to God’s initiative in her regard, but also in the wider context of the OT and in terms of the salvation for all men ushered in by the Incarnation. Mary’s virginity was a fundamental disposition of soul that had been developed and praised repeatedly in the OT: poverty in the sight of God. Mary is the last of a long and distinguished line of OT women who were poor through the barrenness of their womb but were especially blessed by God and made fruitful: Sarah the wife of Abraham and the mother of Isaac, Rebecca the mother of Jacob, Rachel the mother of Joseph, the mother of Samson, Anna the mother of Samuel, Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist. These were women who, though naturally barren, were chosen by God to bear a child of great destiny. They exemplified the idea that woman must look to God for her fruitfulness.<sup>110</sup>

Before the Annunciation Mary was not naturally sterile but was voluntarily a virgin.<sup>111</sup> By her virginal response to God’s initiative, she surrendered herself entirely to Him and made herself dependent on His will. Thus she was an example of the poor ones of Yahweh who looked to Him alone for every blessing. Her poverty of spirit was rewarded by the

<sup>110</sup> J. Galot, S.J., *Mary in the Gospel* (Westminster, Md., 1965) 42–45; “Vierge entre les vierges,” *NRT* 79 (1957) 463–67.

<sup>111</sup> In saying this, I am not pronouncing on the controversy as to whether Mary had made a vow of virginity or not. I am merely noting that at the Annunciation she was a virgin, a condition which she must have freely accepted.



fruitfulness of her womb: she bore a man of great destiny, the Savior of the world, the Messiah longed for throughout the ages. "Mary therefore is the epitome of what the Old Testament had judged 'poor' and of women willed by God to be humanly barren in view of a higher fruitfulness."<sup>112</sup>

But in bearing Jesus Mary gave birth not to just a man but to a new people. Her Son was the first-born of a new creation (Col 1:18-20). In this we can see a parallel with Abraham, who through faith sired a great nation, the people of God.<sup>113</sup> Mary's faith likewise gave birth to an even greater nation, the new people of God. The Church is the new race sprung from the second Adam (1 Cor 15:22), adopted children of the Father (Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:6-7) and disciples of Christ (Rev 12:17). Mary's virginal consent at the Annunciation enabled her to be the mother of this Adam, and her consent was sustained right through to Calvary, where she was declared mother of the disciples. Truly she is the Virgin Mother of the Church.

The Church sees herself as the virginal spouse of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:2) and as such she looks to Mary as her model. (It is interesting to note that in Revelation the faithful disciples are virgins who follow the Lamb wherever he goes: Rev 14:4-5<sup>114</sup>). The Church is a virgin, wholly committed to Christ and dedicated through love to his service. She is also a mother, bringing forth new disciples, new sons of God, patterned on the first-born Son and dedicated to following his example. Mary fulfilled both of these roles in an exemplary manner. Her words to the servants at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5), sum up this dual role: as a virgin, she was perfectly ready to do whatever he wished; as a mother, she brought others to follow him as his disciples. But the foundation on which both of these roles rest—the root which unites them both in the one plant and gives them life—is her discipleship. As the one who hears the word of God and surrenders to it, she is the Virgin par excellence; as the one who receives the Word of God and cherishes Him, she is the Mother of all mothers. No one has expressed this more felicitously than Dante when he sings: *Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio*, "Virgin Mother, daughter (disciple) of your Son."<sup>115</sup>

Thus modeled on Mary ever virgin, the Church sees herself as a virgin-

<sup>112</sup> Galot, *Mary in the Gospel* 44; also Brown et al., *Mary in the NT* 141-43, 285.

<sup>113</sup> G. Graystone, S.M., works out the details of this parallel known to the Fathers (e.g., Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 16, 24, 2; Ambrose, *De Abraham* 2, 9, 61) in his *Virgin of All Virgins: The Interpretation of Luke 1.34* (Rome, 1968) 148-51. See also A. Feuillet, *Jésus et sa mère d'après les récits lucaniens de l'enfance et d'après saint Jean: Le rôle de la Vierge Marie dans l'histoire du salut et la place de la femme dans l'église* (Paris, 1974).

<sup>114</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (AB 38; New York, 1975) 241-46.

<sup>115</sup> *Paradiso*, Cant. 33, 1.

mother too. She looks to the consecrated virgins in her midst as a concrete witness to the world of this mystery deep in her nature. Thus the life of consecrated virginity stands as a symbol of the Church herself; hence its great worth and dignity. As St. Augustine so nicely puts it, "Given the fact that the universal Church is a virgin united to a single spouse, Christ himself, of what great honor are not those members worthy who observe in their very flesh what the entire Church observes in faith?"<sup>116</sup> Through their role in the Church as witnesses to the deepest nature of the Church, which in turn looks to Mary as its model, those who live the life of consecrated virginity are thus linked to Mary. They are "incarnations" of Mary in the world: as virgins they reproduce her life of attentive service to the Word, but as witnesses they also have a maternal role in bringing forth new disciples for Christ, "giving flesh to the Word." In sum, their life is one of radical discipleship, modeled on the perfect disciple, Mary.

#### CONCLUSION

We have seen that the Gospels bear clear witness to the great value Christ puts on discipleship; he esteems it more highly than natural family bonds. Mary's privileged place in his affections, therefore, rests on her discipleship rather than on the fact that she is his mother. Theologians should take this Gospel testimony very seriously and consider Mary's perfect discipleship as the paradigm through which the total mystery of Mary is to be viewed and explained. Discipleship is a concept broad enough to underpin any more specialized understanding of Mary according to the needs of different ages and cultures. It also "explains the remarkable plasticity of her image" throughout the history of the Church;<sup>117</sup> for in the light of her perfect discipleship she can also be hailed as the Mother of God, the model of the Church, and the Virgin of all virgins.

In a recent *Bulletin* René Laurentin lists several deficiencies in the current theology of Mary.<sup>118</sup> Among these he mentions the emphasis on Mary as a sociocultural image, a myth, and an archetype with insufficient attention being paid to her as a real person in the communion of saints. If Mary as a disciple is accepted as a paradigm for the study of Mariology, a counterbalance to this tendency will be ensured; for this understanding of Mary is firmly rooted in the Scriptures and presents her as a concrete person rather than as "une simple image de notre psychisme."

<sup>116</sup> *De sancta virginitate* 2 (PL 40, 397). See also "Even those who consecrate their virginity to God. . . are not deprived of nuptials. Their nuptials are those of the entire Church, in which the groom is Christ himself" (*Tract. in Joan.* 9, 2).

<sup>117</sup> Brown, *Birth of the Messiah* 318, n. 66.

<sup>118</sup> "Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie" 2, *RSPT* 62 (1978) 305-7.

Another deficiency noted by Laurentin is the insistence on the relativity of Mary. She is seen so often today as wholly relative to Christ or wholly relative to the Spirit. It is, of course, true that the mystery of Mary must be understood in relation to the mystery of Christ: she is not autonomous. But this relativity is too often seen in negative terms: Mary is of interest *only* in relation to Christ. Rather, her relativity is a positive feature of her person: it is a positive dynamic reference to God. The paradigm of discipleship is valuable precisely because it illustrates Mary's relation to God and at the same time presents her in a positive light. Relativity is not just an epistemological tool for locating Mary in the theology of salvation; more importantly, it is the key feature of her as a person: she is a disciple.

A third deficiency is that much modern study of Mary seems to have lost contact with living tradition, "the source and root without which everything withers." The notion of Mary the disciple is, on the other hand, firmly rooted in tradition. Consistently through the centuries Mary has been depicted as the handmaid of the Lord, and even today, in this "liberated" age when Mary is held up as a model of liberated women,<sup>119</sup> she is such because her total dependence on God left her free in her dealings with men.

A paradigm is a powerful unifying force in any intellectual discipline. It provides a perspective from which to view the material to be studied and it furnishes the mind with a key concept to marshal the understanding. It is a way of seeing, a "light" illuminating the understanding to see in a particular way and from a particular point of view.

The paradigm of the perfect disciple performs this function for Mariology. It unifies the study. It provides a point of view and acts as a key concept controlling our understanding of all the many facets of the mystery that is Mary. But it is more than a conceptual tool. It gains its power from its "concreteness": it describes a real characteristic of Mary. Just as a scientific paradigm must be a "concrete achievement" in the science, so too in theology must a paradigm be a "concrete" datum of faith. Mary was truly a disciple; Scripture attests to that. Therefore we can use this attribute as our key concept for further study of her qualities and privileges.

A paradigm is not a fundamental principle. Mariology does not develop in logical fashion from a bedrock of principles; it does not unfold from a germ idea. Rather, Mariology grows through reflection on the data of revelation—a reflection which is carried out under the guidance of the key concept, the paradigm, but which does not have to follow any

<sup>119</sup> Pastoral Letter of U.S. Bishops, *Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith* (Nov. 21, 1973) par. 142.

particular logical order. Order and systematization follow once the various facets of the mystery of Mary are confronted and seen in the light of the paradigm.

Nor is study through a paradigm a form of reductionism. The virtues and privileges of Mary are not reduced to various forms of discipleship—as I have tried to show. Mary's motherhood of Christ and of the Church are not mere manifestations of her discipleship; they are understood in their own right as her greatest privileges and roles in the economy of salvation, but our understanding of them is certainly enriched through viewing them with the eyes of discipleship. Likewise with her virginity: the two elements of discipleship as found in the Gospels—divine initiative and human response—provided the key to our investigation of the significance of her virginity. Moreover, by means of the reciprocity mentioned earlier, our understanding of Mary's motherhood and her virginity in the light of her discipleship enhances our appreciation of what it means to be a disciple.

Thus, using Mary's discipleship as a paradigm in our study in no way lessens her dignity or detracts from her other privileges; rather, it enriches our understanding and enhances our appreciation. Mary remains the Mother of God and the Blessed Virgin. These are the most glorious jewels in her crown of virtues; her discipleship is the gold which binds them together and the lustre with which they shine.