

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MARY

By KEVIN MCNAMARA

IN RECENT YEARS the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church has come increasingly to the fore among Christians in their daily lives and also in the work of theologians. In the Roman Catholic Church in particular the progress of the movement of charismatic renewal has been a major influence. It has been responsible for a veritable 'discovery of the Spirit' by great numbers of the faithful, who are now aware in a totally new way of the activity of the Spirit in their lives. Concurrently with this development, roman catholic theologians have acknowledged the relative neglect of the Spirit which has long been a mark of catholic theology and have set to work with vigour to remedy this defect. As one striking example of this new direction in theology, which holds out so much promise for the future, one may note the splendid three-volume work entitled *I believe in the Holy Spirit* which has recently been completed by Fr Congar, the french dominican theologian.¹

For those familiar with Fr Congar's work, and particularly with his writings on the Church, the publication of this major study on the Holy Spirit will hardly have come as a surprise. Some of you no doubt will be familiar with Congar's account of a meeting he had with two observers of the Eastern Orthodox Church during the Second Vatican Council, when the Council's Constitution on the Church was in the course of preparation. 'If we had to write a treatise on the Church', they said to him, 'we would write one chapter on the Holy Spirit and one chapter on the christian man. Then we could stop. We would have said what was essential'.

When I first came across this remark, I found it extremely illuminating, and I still think today that it sums up what most needed to be corrected in the prevailing understanding of the Church among Catholics prior to the Council. I have little doubt that the perspective it expresses has greatly influenced the work of Fr Congar since the Council, and also that of other leading roman catholic theologians who have written on the Holy Spirit in recent years.

It is true, of course, that the titles of the two proposed chapters — the Holy Spirit and the christian man — make no mention of the

hierarchical structure of the Church, which so largely dominated catholic ecclesiology in the past. They do not necessarily exclude it, however. Their great merit is that they indicate the context in which the hierarchical ministry must be situated. That context is the life of the people of God as a whole. The fact that this was also the theme of chapter two of the Council's Constitution on the Church — the chapter immediately preceding that on the hierarchical ministry — shows that the Council fathers too were clearly aware of the need to give priority to the common life in Christ of God's people as a whole. To a degree, therefore, the Council did have a chapter on the christian man, or on what is called christian anthropology. It did not, however, have a chapter on the Holy Spirit, even though the Constitution as a whole contains many references to the Spirit and, as the work of the Council proceeded, a greater effort was made, largely in response to the eastern viewpoint, to give more prominence to the Spirit in the various Council documents.

It is clear, then, that we are being faithful to the mind of the Council fathers, and to one of the most basic thrusts of their thinking on the Church, when we give full value to the Council's references to the Spirit and when we pursue the implications of these references. As we do so, more and more we come to see the life of the Church as life in the Spirit, as human life renewed and transformed by the Spirit of Christ.

In this perspective the Church appears clearly as the common life of worship of God, service of God and one's neighbour, and witness to Christ before the world. It appears as the gathering into unity and wholeness of the human race which had been broken and scattered by sin; as the people of God making its way in faith and hope to its final goal at the end of history; as the holy Church which is also the Church of sinners, continually in the process of conversion and renewal. The institutional elements of the Church — the ministry, the sacraments, the articles of faith — are all presupposed and included here, but the spotlight is on the manifold life of the whole christian people and on the Spirit of Christ which at every point is the origin of that life, its sustaining force and its bond of unity.

This activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church is above all a work of love. To introduce the love of God into men's hearts is the most characteristic work of the Spirit of God. It is here that his power achieves its crowning success. Through faith he lays hold of sinful man, of the 'fleshly man', in the language of Paul, and opens his heart to the love of God. All the activity of the Spirit is directed to

this end. As the eternal love of the Father and the Son, the Spirit draws the faithful into the circle of divine love, giving them the assurance that God is their Father (Rom 8, 15f). Thus the 'new man' comes into being, the spiritual man, in whom are found the characteristic activities of christian existence: thanksgiving, praise, penance, good works, witness, all those activities in fact — and here we catch a glimpse of the Spirit's role in the liturgy — which may be summed up as the spiritual sacrifices of God's priestly people.

In the spiritual man are found too the fruits of the Spirit, which are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5, 22f). 'Against such', adds Paul, 'there is no law', thereby indicating a further quality of existence in the Spirit: freedom from the constraint of the law, a freedom which consists in the inner transformation of man's will, giving him the inclination and the ability to obey, making it, as it were, second nature for him to do the will of God.

So far I have been speaking only of the Holy Spirit, which is but part of my topic. It is time to introduce the second part of my theme, namely the role of Mary and, in particular, her relationship to the Spirit. It seems to me that this can now be done very easily. For all that I have been saying about the Spirit and the christian man has been setting the scene for the entrance of Mary. Mary is, after all, the perfect realization of christian anthropology. She is the matchless prototype of the human person elevated and transformed by grace. In her we see embodied to a surpassing degree the existence of 'the christian man'.

For this reason the two orthodox observers who spoke to Fr Congar at the Council might, I believe, equally well have said to him that the two chapters of their treatise on the Church would be devoted respectively to the Holy Spirit and to Mary. Certainly it would be possible to say the essentials about christian existence by speaking about Mary, and no tradition would find it easier to do this than the tradition of the East.

The Vatican Council itself took a major step in this direction when it incorporated its treatment of Mary into its Constitution on the Church, and especially when it gave new prominence to the theme Mary and the Church. By doing so it presented Mary as the model of the Church's life and the life of the individual Christian, as the first and most perfect disciple of Christ, whose faith, love and obedience to God's word are an incomparable example for all succeeding generations.

It should now be clear that nothing could be more natural than the juxtaposition of the two themes, the Holy Spirit and Mary, such as we find in the title of this paper. It must rather be a matter for surprise that so little attention should have been given in the past to a relationship which, in the light of what we have seen, appears so normal and also so important.

Another point should now be evident. The theme we are dealing with has profound implications for our understanding of what it means to be a Christian and of the significance of the Church for our life. We are not discussing abstract doctrines or questions of mere ritual or organization. We are dealing with the deepest spiritual realities, with what is personal, inward, everlasting.

At the same time we are following a promising line in ecumenical discussion. As far as the orthodox/roman catholic dialogue is concerned, this will be clear from what I have already said. In regard to the Churches of the reformation tradition, the prominent place accorded to the Spirit in that tradition also holds out hope of a fruitful dialogue in the context of our theme.

After these rather general introductory remarks let us try now to come closer to the heart of our subject. Where better to begin than with the scriptural account of the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she was to become with child by the power of the Holy Spirit. The angel's words are reported by Luke as follows: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God' (Lk 1,35).

In this text there are clear echoes of several important Old Testament themes. The reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit recalls the prophecy of Isaiah about the coming of the Spirit in messianic times. The Spirit will come, Isaiah says, to repair the devastation that is increasingly coming upon Israel because of its infidelity. On that day the Spirit will transform Israel from a sterile wilderness into a pleasant and fruitful garden. Justice will abound and the people will live in tranquillity and peace (Isai 32,15-18).

This prophecy is closely related to another well-known isaian passage in which the prophet foretells the outpouring of God's Spirit on his people. The desert soil will be watered and will bear abundant fruit: that is to say, Israel will be delivered from the desolation of exile and captivity and will be blessed with the knowledge and intimate friendship of God (Isai 44,3-5).

The reference, which is clear in these texts, to the coming into

being of the new people of God through the action of the Spirit brings to mind also two passages from the prophet Ezekiel. One of these speaks of the transformation of hearts by the power of the Spirit, while at the same time the land of Israel, which has grown desolate, will become a new garden of paradise. The other passage is the celebrated oracle which describes the coming together of the dry bones which the prophet sees scattered on the ground. Through the divine action they take on the shape and form of human bodies, into which the Lord then infuses the breath of life (Ezek 36,25-35; 37,1-10).

From such texts as these we see that the coming of the Holy Spirit on Mary at the moment of the Incarnation is the culminating point of a long history. The aim of that history is to make possible the coming of the promised messiah. The messiah will come when God finally meets, from within the people of Israel, the response of perfect faith and obedience which he has long sought, and which the Spirit has been working to bring about.

In Mary, the humble maid of Nazareth, the desired response finally becomes a reality. From the beginning Mary has been prepared by the Spirit for that purpose. As the fairest flower of the *anawim*, the poor of Yahweh, whose hidden link with the Spirit of God is hinted at in Matthew's description of them as 'the poor in spirit', Mary stands at the apex of the sacred history which began with the call of Abraham. The faith of Abraham finds its counterpart in Mary's utter trust in God and her total assent to his designs. Compared with her faith, that of Abraham, great though it was, is now seen as no more than a beginning, a foreshadowing of what was to come.

In Mary, then, Israel fulfills its appointed task as God's chosen people, as the bride of Yahweh who had so long refused to utter from her heart the unrestricted 'Yes' that Yahweh had called for. Under the influence of the Spirit, Mary, by her response, opens the way to the coming of the messianic age. The assent expressed in Mary's *fiat* is therefore at one and the same time an end and a beginning. The role she plays in the birth of her Son can by no means be confined to that event or limited to him alone. It would be unintelligible that she would not continue to be involved in God's saving acts in and through his people. Mary's ministry in bringing the messiah into the world is destined to be prolonged. She will continue to be associated with her Son as he carries out the destiny assigned to him. And in this role she will be at all times the chosen instrument of the Spirit, the Spirit's totally responsive associate and collaborator.

The most striking expression in the New Testament of this continuing co-operation of Mary with the Holy Spirit is found in the account in the Acts of the Apostles of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. As foretold by Christ, the Spirit came at Pentecost to fill the Church with heavenly blessings and to launch it on its mission of proclaiming the gospel throughout the world. As the disciples await the fulfilment of Jesus's promise, Mary, as is clear from Luke's account, is among their number. With the others she prays for the Spirit's coming. As at the moment of the Incarnation, her faith and love contribute, in God's design, to this new intervention of the Spirit. Just as her virginal conception of Jesus by the power of the Spirit was in a certain sense a response to the intense desire of her heart to be totally at God's service, so that, as the classic phrase of Augustine has it, *prius concepit mente quam corpore* — so now at Pentecost her prayers, and the love that inspires them, are instrumental in the great outpouring of the Spirit that is to launch the Church on its way. At the Annunciation Mary co-operated with the Spirit in the Incarnation of the messiah, destined to be the Saviour and ruler of his people; at Pentecost she co-operates with the Spirit in the emergence of that people on to the stage of human history. She who had first become the Mother of Christ is now revealed as Mother of the Church, and central to her motherhood on each occasion are the humility, obedience and loving trust in God which unite her profoundly to the Holy Spirit and persuade him, as it were, to intervene and to exercise his mighty power for the salvation of the world.

Throughout the history of the Church Mary does not cease, in co-operation with the Spirit, to exercise her role as Mother, whether of the Church as a whole or of the individual Christians who make it up. In the face of immense difficulties, the apostles and disciples of the Lord began their work of preaching and conversion. Who can doubt that they were inspired in this endeavour by Mary's example and supported by the power of her intercession? From her who has been called by Pope Paul VI the 'Star of Evangelization', they learned the same lesson which the Spirit of Jesus was teaching them in the depths of their hearts — that evangelization consists essentially in opening up a way to human hearts for the person of Christ; and that what the herald of the gospel needs most of all is something which existed first and to a surpassing degree in the soul of Mary, namely intimate knowledge of Christ and profound union with him in love.

From Mary too the apostles learned that their role in the Church was to be, like her, at the service of the Spirit in bringing forth Christ in the souls of men. That is to say, it was to be essentially a maternal role, exercised in the power of the Spirit. Everything they did in fulfilment of their ministry was to be viewed in this light, from the first proclamation of new life in Christ to the bestowal of that life in the sacrament of baptism and the celebration of its fullness in the eucharist, together with the exercise of pastoral care and the continuing formation of God's people in the mysteries of the faith.

From this it would naturally follow that in everything the apostolic ministry should bear a maternal stamp, that it should be marked at every stage by the characteristic qualities of motherhood. And this in fact is what we find clearly inscribed in the pages of the New Testament. For how better than in terms of a mother's love and solicitude for her children can one convey the all-consuming concern for their converts of the apostles and their collaborators in the preaching of the gospel?

It is no doubt significant that the maternal qualities, specifically in our context the marian qualities, which are so readily discernible in the New Testament record of the founding of the Church by the apostles, are also qualities which we especially associate with the Spirit of God and which the New Testament in fact ascribes to him — in the first place love, which is the Spirit's highest gift, and then the many qualities that flow from love and give it expression: generosity, service, self-sacrifice, sympathy, understanding, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, patience, steadfastness, courage. In this striking parallelism between the work of the Spirit and the influence of Mary we catch a glimpse of the extraordinary similarity of Mary and the Spirit, and the degree to which the inmost life of the Spirit finds expression in Mary and in her salvific role.

If we wish to explore further the implications of Mary's maternal role in relation to the Church, and her inseparable association with the Spirit, who is the source in the Church of all grace, spiritual power and apostolic activity, we need only bring to mind the varied forms of the Church's life and the part ascribed to Mary in each one of them by the tradition of the Church.

As an outstanding modern witness to that tradition, as it has developed in the western Church, may I invoke here Pope John Paul II, whose marian teaching is marked by a profound emphasis on the unceasing and all-embracing activity of Mary in the exercise of her role as Mother of the Church. 'Mary', the pope says, 'must be on all the

ways of the Church's life'. Noting that his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, called Mary Mother of the Church at the close of the Second Vatican Council, he asserts that from that time onwards Paul VI continued to call upon Mary under that title and 'above all to invoke her to take part as mother in the life of the Church, this Church which, during the Council, became more aware of her own nature and mission'.

In line with this development in the marian teaching of his predecessor, the writings and addresses of Pope John Paul II are full of invocations of Mary 'to take part as mother in the life of the Church'. Again and again he asks her to show for the Church a mother's love, care and protection. To her he commits every aspect of the Church's life without exception, beginning with his own papal ministry. To her he entrusts the Church in each country and diocese, but also entire nations, the destiny of the world, the work of civilization and culture, the world-wide struggle for peace, brotherhood and justice. He invokes her motherly care for priests and bishops, for religious, for missionaries and the missions, in a special way for the poor, the sick, the oppressed, the handicapped, those who are the victims of disease and famine.

To Mary, too, the pope commends the continuing renewal of the Church launched by the Second Vatican Council. The safe keeping of the Church's doctrine, together with its deeper appropriation by the whole people of God; the work of evangelization in all its aspects; vocations to the priesthood and the religious life; the 'domestic Church' of the family of which Mary too is Mother; the intensification of the life of prayer and the closer following of Christ by all the baptized; christian education in the school and in the home; the formation of youth in the knowledge, love and service of Christ; the fidelity of husbands and wives to their vocation in marriage; the witness of single people; the christian endeavour of all classes and groups in the Church without exception — all this the pope commends to the watchful concern of Mary, Mother of the Church, Mother of every individual Christian, Mother of all mankind.

To Mary, finally, the pope entrusts the great work of unity among Christians. He addresses her as Mother of Unity, asking her to teach us always the paths that lead to unity. Under the eyes of Mary our Mother he says, 'we are ready to recognize our mutual faults, our selfishness and delays'. He expresses the hope that in due time, as the fruit of Mary's prayer, joined to our prayers, there will come about that full unity of Christians which she, as Mother, certainly desires more ardently than anyone.²

In all this Pope John Paul II is simply giving detailed expression to the phrase in which, as we saw, he sums up Mary's role as Mother of the Church, that she must be, namely, 'on all the ways of the Church's life'. It is no less true, however, that all the forms of apostolic activity to which the pope links Mary, all the expressions of the Church's life which he commits to her care, are totally dependent on the Holy Spirit. They are, after all, without exception, fruits of the saving work of Christ. They are so many ways in which the mission Christ gave to his Church is being carried out, so many ways of making him more fully present in the Church itself and in the world. But it is in and through the Spirit that Christ is present to the Church, that he fills it with heavenly blessings, that he is the source of its life, its mission, its varied forms of witness, worship and service. That is why we attribute to the Spirit the regenerating power of the waters of baptism, the life of grace in the souls of the justified, the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, the presence of Christ in the eucharist, the graces of the eucharist and the other sacraments, the guidance of the Church in the exercise of its teaching ministry, the illumination of the hearts of the believing community, the many charisms, vocations and ministries which enrich and adorn the Church and equip it to fulfil its appointed task.

Mary and the Spirit, therefore, are inseparably joined, and each is active in every aspect of the Church's life. It is possible, of course, to minimize the role of one or the other, indeed it is quite possible to minimize the role of both. The latter happens when attention is concentrated directly and exclusively on Christ, or perhaps one should say on Jesus, because if both Mary and the Spirit are overlooked it becomes difficult, as experience shows, to maintain any real sense of the transcendence of Christ, of his heavenly origins as the eternal Son of God or of his glory as the risen Lord established in power at the right hand of the Father.

As far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, the temptation has undoubtedly been neglect of the role of the Spirit, while emphasizing that of Mary. Indeed it has been stated from the protestant side that Catholics give the impression of substituting Mary for the Spirit: In a much-quoted article entitled 'Mary and the protestant mind' Elsie Gibson has this to say: 'When I began the study of catholic theology, every place I expected to find an exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, I found Mary. What Protestants universally attribute to the action of the Holy Spirit was attributed to Mary'.³

In the light of what we have seen about Mary's maternal role in the Church this reaction is wholly understandable. The question is, however, whether the problem is to be resolved simply by the replacement of Mary by the Spirit in catholic theology and devotion, or rather by searching out the fundamental links between Mary and the Spirit and, against that background, endeavouring to see what is the role of each and how their roles are related. The latter course is, I believe, the correct one. It has much to offer, not only for the enrichment of catholic theology and for establishing a better balance in catholic doctrine and devotion, but also for ecumenical understanding and progress on the road to unity.

In any such enquiry into the precise relationship between Mary and the Spirit one point of fundamental importance can immediately be noted. It has already emerged more or less clearly in the course of this paper. I have in mind the means by which Mary exercises her maternal influence in the Church. She does so, not by any activity bearing directly on the life of grace in the hearts of Christians, or on the efficacy of the sacraments. Such activity is the province of the Spirit, and no creature, however holy or exalted, can play a part in it. However much we may underline Mary's role, however wide the range of her activity is considered to be, it must always be conceived in very different terms from these.

Because this principle has constantly been recognized in the catholic tradition, the apparent priority given to Mary over the Spirit by Catholics cannot be taken to imply that Mary is seen as displacing the Spirit or as taking on the role which is proper to him.⁴ Basically we are again in the presence of the catholic 'both . . . and', as distinct from the exclusive protestant emphasis on the work of God in our salvation. It must be acknowledged, however, that in giving a major role in this work both to Mary and the Spirit, Catholics have spoken much more about the former than the latter. To some extent this can be understood, since of the three persons of the Trinity the Spirit is the one whose personality is the least clearly defined, so that we find it more difficult to think and speak of him. It has indeed been suggested that it is by focusing our attention on Mary that we can best understand the Spirit, since she, being totally pervaded by him, gives him, so to speak, a distinguishable personal profile, which otherwise eludes us.⁵

This is a point to which we shall return. In the meantime let us take note of the precise manner in which Mary exerts her influence on the Church and on the life of the Christian. There are two basic

ways in which she does so. One is the force of her example as the most perfect disciple of her Son, outstanding above all others in faith and love. The other is the power of her maternal intercession, a power based on her extraordinary holiness and her intimate association with the work of redemption. If Mary is, as Pope John Paul II affirms, present on all the ways of the Church's life; if she is close to every one of her children and a universal source of heavenly assistance, this is to be understood in the sense that her example is an inspiration to all and her prayers, which embrace the whole range of the Church's life, are of immense value and efficacy in the sight of God.

Pope Paul VI writes:

The activity of the Mother of the Church for the benefit of the redeemed does not replace, or compete with, the almighty and universal action of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the former implores and prepares for the latter, not only by prayer of intercession, in harmony with the divine plans which Mary contemplates in the beatific vision, but also by the direct influence of her example, in particular the extremely important one of her supreme docility to the inspirations of the Divine Spirit. It is, therefore, always in dependence on the Holy Spirit that Mary leads souls to Jesus, forms them in her image, inspires them with good advice and serves as a bond of love between Jesus and the faithful.⁶

I realize, of course, that from a strictly protestant viewpoint these explanations may be of only limited assistance. The assurance that Mary is seen as in no way trespassing on the role of the Spirit as the immediate and only effective cause of God's grace will no doubt be welcomed and wholeheartedly endorsed. There remains, however, the question of intercession, which may still seem to the protestant way of thinking to go beyond the limits of human participation in the saving work of Christ. This, however, is a problem far wider in extent than the specific topic of the Holy Spirit and Mary which we are here discussing. Its roots lie deep in the theological upheaval of the Reformation and have extended themselves into many of the major questions that are today the subject of serious ecumenical discussion between representatives of the reformation and catholic traditions.

Our best hope of progress in this difficult area must surely lie in the deeper study of the history of salvation, as recorded in the bible, which is now engaging the attention of scripture scholars and theologians from the various christian denominations. From these studies

may come a better understanding of the relationship, in God's design, between the gifts he bestows on his creatures and the mission which these gifts bring with them, a mission which in the catholic tradition has been understood to embrace active participation, by the power of God's grace, in the very work of salvation.

To return, however, to the respective roles of Mary and the Holy Spirit, and how they are related. From what we have seen so far we may say that Mary is, in a sense, the instrument of the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation, or, if we prefer, that she is his intimate associate, wholly dependent on him, yet utterly free and totally in possession of herself. On this basis a strand of tradition which goes back to Prudentius at the end of the fourth century describes Mary as spouse of the Holy Spirit. The title is not without its disadvantages, however — it might seem to suggest, for example, that the Holy Spirit is the Father of Jesus — and for that reason it has failed to find general support. As if to draw attention to its limitations Pope Paul VI, while applying it to Mary in a passage which I quote below, nevertheless qualifies his use of it by the addition of the adjective 'mystical': Mary, he says, is the 'mystical bride of the divine Paraclete'.

Presupposed in this intimate association of Mary and the Spirit is another and prior aspect of their relationship. From the first moment of her existence Mary was being prepared by the Spirit for the sublime task that awaited her. Under the powerful action of the Spirit she gradually grew in holiness, until the supreme moment came when she was to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate. If we wish to have some idea of the exalted degree of holiness she had then reached, we need only reflect on the immense faith that was required of her in order to give the appropriate response to the message of the angel, a response which found expression in the unforgettable words: *fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*.

According to the testimony of christian tradition, the mystery of the Incarnation, in which the Spirit fashioned from Mary's body the human nature of the Son of God, brought about a further increase in her holiness, as did also the event of Pentecost. Nothing, therefore, is more characteristic of Mary than the indwelling in her soul of the Spirit of holiness and his pervasive presence throughout her whole being. She is *par excellence* the abode of the Spirit. She is filled to overflowing with his life and the abundance of his gifts. In all that she is and does she is totally possessed by him and utterly responsive to his action. It is for this reason that she is fittingly described as the

Temple of the Holy Spirit, a title which christian tradition has long accorded her. Let us listen again to the words of Pope Paul VI:

By an action at once very powerful and very sweet, he [i.e., the Holy Spirit] has adapted perfectly Mary's whole person, with all her faculties and energies, physical as well as spiritual, to the tasks assigned to her on the plane of redemption. This belief springs from an understanding of the sacred texts that has grown deeper and clearer in the course of time. On this basis, fathers and doctors of the Church, in both East and West, have attributed Mary's fullness of grace and charity to the various missions of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. This includes the gifts and fruits of every virtue, as well as the evangelical beatitudes and special charisms. Like a trousseau for a heavenly wedding, all of these adorned her who was predestined as the mystical bride of the Divine Paraclete, and Mother of God's word made flesh. Because of her privileges and exceptional gifts of grace, all of which come from the divine Spirit, Mary is greeted in the Sacred Liturgy as *Templum Domini, Sacrarium Spiritus Sancti* (Temple of the Lord, Sanctuary of the Holy Spirit).⁷

At this point it is worth noticing and bringing into the limelight the precise function that Mary, as the instrument of the Spirit, carries out in God's plan of salvation. In her womb the eternal Word of God is united to humanity. It is for this sublime ministry that the Holy Spirit comes upon her and overshadows her with his divine power. By providing the Son of God with a human body, she becomes the bridge between the Trinity and mankind, the link establishing communion between God and man in the person of Jesus Christ. This function she continues to fulfil throughout the history of the Church. To this day she is the Mother of Christ in the members of Christ, as she continues to bring Christ to birth within them. Through her maternal influence she continues to be the link between the Son of God and the human race, as she constantly draws men and women into communion with him in the power of the Holy Spirit, leading them onward to their final meeting with him when he returns in glory at the end of history.

This role of Mary as link between mankind and the Holy Trinity calls to mind the distinguishing characteristic of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Godhead. It is the Spirit who completes the cycle of knowledge and love among the persons of the Trinity. As the expression of the mutual self-giving of the Father and the Son he is in person the infinite love which unites them. This love then overflows beyond the boundaries of the Trinity to draw mankind into the

inmost life of the Godhead. From this point of view Mary, placing herself at the service of the Spirit for the Incarnation of the eternal Son, fulfills a role which not only makes her the instrument of the Spirit and causes her to be totally filled with his presence; it is also modelled on the Spirit's specific function within the Trinity, on his personal divine being as the Spirit who, proceeding from the Father and the Son, joins them together in love and eventually becomes the bond of unity between them and mankind.

We may recall here my passing reference above to the similarity between the characteristic qualities of Mary's maternal activity in regard to the Church and what scripture tells us concerning the distinguishing marks of the Spirit of God. No doubt there are solid grounds for the opinion, to which various authors have given their support, that Mary in a special way incorporates in herself and sets before our eyes something that is distinctive of the third person of the Trinity. In this perspective, if we wish to penetrate to some extent the relative anonymity of the Spirit as portrayed in scripture, we cannot do better than contemplate the mystery of Mary and the Spirit's role in regard to her.

Along this line of thought we join up with a description of Mary favoured by many theologians. It is an idea which would seem to have a specific New Testament basis in the great sign appearing in the heavens of which the author of the Apocalypse speaks (Apoc 12): 'the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet', who probably represents both Mary and the Church and, through them, the protective power of the grace of God and of the Spirit who is its source. The description to which I refer is Mary, ikon or image of the Spirit. By this is meant that in Mary the Spirit is present and is in a certain sense made visible. In her person, her activity and her final destiny the Spirit is disclosed as the Spirit of unity and love, as he who recreates and gathers together mankind and the entire universe and leads them forward to their final union with God at the end of time.

Something of the richness and complexity of this idea may be grasped from a remarkable paragraph from the pen of the well-known french mariologist, René Laurentin. His words recall, in the context of Mary as ikon of the Spirit, a number of the themes I have touched on in the course of this paper.

The whole development of the destiny of the Virgin in the history of salvation (and so all her privileges) are a manifestation and an exemplary realization of the Spirit who in a certain way enlarges the

company of the divine persons by the divinization of human persons, the unity of the Trinity by the communion of saints in Christ Jesus. The Spirit who is the transcendent and spiritual principle of the work of grace has established Mary as the human and bodily principle of this work of love in creation. In all things, from the Immaculate Conception to the *fiat* of the Incarnation (this *fiat* to which the Spirit has given a universal significance), from the first miracle of Jesus to his death, which was at once inspired by the Spirit and the source of the Spirit (Jn 19,30), from Pentecost to the last things, she is, in total dependence, the privileged place and image of the Spirit, the visible type and ideal realization of the divine communion which he brings into being and perfects in the Church.⁸

This concept of Mary as ikon of the Holy Spirit sums up the inter-relationship of Mary, the Spirit and the Church and the bonds that unite them. At every moment the Church depends on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the source of its life, its growth, its worship, its salvific activity in all its forms. To speak of the Church, however, is also to speak of Mary. She is its model in faith and love and in the spiritual fruitfulness that flows from them. She is the Church at the highest point of its perfection and achievement. It follows that the more fully the Church comes under the dominion of the Spirit, the more closely it is identified with Mary.

This means that in our efforts to become more aware of the role of the Spirit in our lives as Christians, we must at the same time draw closer to Mary. The more Mary, the Spirit and the Church merge into one another in our thoughts, in our prayers, in our lives, the more authentic is our vision of God's plan of salvation, and the nearer we come to Christ, whom the Church, under the maternal influence of Mary's immaculate heart, continually brings to birth within us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

NOTES

¹ Congar, Yves: *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols, (London, 1983).

² For the marian teaching of Pope John Paul II see McNamara, Kevin: *Mary, the Mother of God (Teachings of Pope John Paul II)*, (CTS, London, 1983); John Paul II, *This is your mother*, ed Seamus O'Byrne (Athlone, 1981).

³ Gibson, E.: 'Mary and the protestant mind', in *Review for Religious* 24 (1965), pp 396f.

⁴ Cf Barré, H.: 'Marie et l'esprit dans la tradition occidentale jusqu'à Saint Thomas d'Aquin', in *Études mariales, Le Saint Esprit et Marie* (1968), pp 124f.

⁵ Duff, Frank: 'Mary and the Holy Spirit', in *The woman of Genesis* (Athlone, 1976), pp 274-87.

⁶ Letter to Cardinal Suenens for the International Marian Conference on 'The Holy Spirit and Mary' (Rome, 18-21 May 1975).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Laurentin, R.: 'Esprit Saint et théologie mariale', in *Nouvelle revue théologique*, 89 (1967), p 42.