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The Marian Title “Mother of the Church” within the Context of the Second Vatican Council and the Reception Thereof

Abstract: In the recent Doctrinal Note *Mater Populi Fidelis*, published in 2025, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith expressed an invitation to pay greater attention to the precise use, proper meaning, and interpretation of titles and expressions referring to Mary (MPF 2). This article provides a response to this invitation and examines the Marian legacy of the Second Vatican Council, focusing on the title of Mary “Mother of the Church.” This title was presented using a comparative method of the documents published before the Second Vatican Council and during the council’s deliberations with its solemn promulgation. The third chapter examines the postconciliar reception of this Marian title in ordinary papal teaching, theology, liturgy, and Marian devotion. In the conclusions, key findings from the reception process are presented, as well as persisting difficulties concerning the title “Mother of the Church.”

Keywords: Mother of the Church, Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI, spiritual motherhood

1. Introduction

An important element of the “balzo innanzi” (“leap forward”) of the Second Vatican Council – as it is called by Marco Vergottini, a theologian from Milan – being an attempt at reaching the authentic roots of the Christian message in order to update the language and practice of faith so it could be imparted to modern humans (2012, 3) – is its Marian doctrine. Armand J. Robichaud pointed out that the Church, deepening its self-consciousness, has gained much through the study of the Person proclaimed as the Mother of the Church by Pope Paul VI, just as the study

of the Church has helped the understanding of Mary (1987, 86). Pope Montini, proclaiming Mary to be the Mother of the Church by the power of his authority at the end of the third session of the Council, opened a new chapter for this important Marian title. From the perspective of more than sixty years since that exalted event, one should look at its reception, both in the Papal teaching comprising a part of the teaching of the Church, and in theology, particularly in Mariology and the related Marian piety. Aiming at creation of a harmonious synthesis between the generality and specificity of the existing studies of this subject matter (Amato 1987, 1–8; Borowski 2022, 457–60; Dittrich 2009; Dodd 2006, 322–35; Drzyżdżyk 2008, 117–29; Galot 1985, 118–30; Łaszewski 1992, 193–206; Padovano 1966, 27–45; Polak 1999, 117–33; Roten 2015, 1–53; Życiński 1997, 419–33), the most relevant method, as Julian Wojtkowski terms it, will be used, namely, the comparative method (1969, 322).

2. Background: The Title “Mother of the Church”

2.1. Prior to the Second Vatican Council

Speaking of the onset of usage of the title “Mother of the Church,” most authors point out the 9th (Galot 1985, 125; Życiński 1997, 426) or 11th–12th century (Dodd 2006, 323; Galot 1964, 1166; Jezierski 2012, 70; Łaszewski 1992, 194; Napiórkowski 2019, 608; Wojtkowski 1969, 321), rendering groundless the interpretation of a Servite (OSM), Fr. Gabriel Roschini, that the title under consideration originated as early as the 5th century, since it was present in the epitaph of little Magnus, kept at the Lateran Museum (Jones 2023, 2; Polak 1999, 118). The first author to use the title *Mater Ecclesiae* is commonly identified as a certain Berengarius (Berengaudus), a medieval author who, in his commentary to chapter 12 of Revelation, dating back probably to the 11th or 12th century (Jones 2023, 4) says that the mysterious woman represents the Church but she may also symbolize Mary who is called the Mother of the Church (*mater sit Ecclesiae*), since it is Her to whom we owe giving birth to its Head (Berengaudus 1879, 960), or the “Daughter of the Church,”

enjoying the greatest sanctity among its members (Galot 1964, 1167; Jones 2023, 4; Polak 1999, 119). In his doctoral thesis, Achim Dittrich provides an extensive discussion of the history and meaning of the title “Mother of the Church,” pointing out that, although the grand period of *Mater Ecclesiae* is connected with the 12th century, the title itself comes from the Carolingian era, i.e., roughly from mid-9th century, and has distinct Augustinian roots (2009, 126–27). In the Middle Ages, Anselm of Canterbury will confidently say that the Mother of God is our Mother (*Mater Dei est mater nostra*: Anselmus, *Oratio* 52, 8 [Anselmus 1864, 957]) – advocating Mary’s universal motherhood (Dittrich 2009, 148). Rupert of Deutz, a medieval Benedictine, confirming Mary’s universal motherhood, will name the passion of Christ as the moment at which the Blessed Virgin gave birth to salvation for everyone (Rupertus, *Commentaria in Evangelium Sancti Johannis* [Rupertus 1854b, 790]). Rupert, referred to by Dittrich as the real theologian of *Mater Ecclesiae* (2009, 172), is the first who does not hesitate to compare Mary’s suffering at Calvary with the pains of a pregnant woman giving birth to her children (Kałdon 2009, 166–67). Furthermore, in his commentary to the Song of Songs, he compares Mary to “a source of gardens” and calls Her “the Mother of Churches” (*Mater Ecclesiarum* [Rupertus 1854a, 898]). The most eminent medieval worshipper of Mary, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, does not use the title *Mater Ecclesiae* (Dittrich 2009, 178). The usage of this title, on the other hand, is confirmed by liturgical books, antiphons (e.g. Hartker’s antiphonary) and prayers (e.g. the Grüss-Oratio [greeting prayer]) dated to the period between the 10th and 14th century (Polak 1999, 120).

An important and frequently referenced piece of evidence for the title *Mater Ecclesiae* being present in Late Middle Ages is *Distinctiones Monasticae*, a liturgical handbook or dictionary by an English Cistercian from early 13th century, explaining that Mary is the Daughter of the Church, thus making the Church the Mother of Mary, but Mary is the Mother of Church as well (Dittrich 2009, 183–88; Galot 1964, 1167; Warzeszak 2011, 60–61). Peter Canisius, a 16th-century Jesuit theologian and preacher, will stress that Mary

had become not only the Mother of God but of the Church (*Ecclesiae Mater*) as well (Petrus Canisius 1577, 532; cf. Dittrich 2009, 287–94).

The first pope who indirectly proclaimed Mary as the Mother of the Church was Benedict XIV. In his *Gloriosae Dominae* apostolic letter of 27 September 1748, he speaks of the Church's filial feelings to Mary whom it considers its mother (*GD*, 428; cf. Borowski 2022, 457; Kaldon 2006, 163), “Mother of all believers” (Bartosik 1993, 95). Less than one hundred and fifty years later, Pope Leo XIII, in his *Adiutricem populi* encyclical of 5 September 1895, concerning the worship of the Mother of God, will be the first to use the phrase “the truest Mother of the Church” (*verissime quidem mater Ecclesiae*) (*AP*, 302; cf. Borowski 2022, 457; Dittrich 2009, 437–42; Dodd 2006, 324). Among propagators of Marian piety, with particular reference to the Mother of the Church, Angelo Amato enumerates: St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, Blessed Antonio Rosmini-Serbati, St. John Bosco, and the French writer Auguste Nicolas (Amato 1987, 7–8). Almost on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII used the titles “the Mother of the Mystical Body” (Ioannes 1959, 713; Ioannes 1961, 505) and “the Mother of the Church” (Carbone 1988, 5; Ioannes 1960, 980) in his speeches.

Mary's calling to be the Mother of the Church – the mystical Body of Christ, just as she had been the Mother of Christ by body, the Mother who adopted the newly-born Church at the foot of the Cross and set out with it under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is also mentioned in the published articles from the 1950s (Elbert 1958, 30). In September 1958, the 3rd World Mariological Congress was held in Lourdes, devoted to the subject “*Maria et Ecclesia*” (Dittrich 2009, 528–36). A long-year director of the Thomistic Institute, Fr. Kazimierz Marciniak, in his study on the Mother of the Holy Church (1965, 411–28) provides an excellent outline of the condition of Mariology before and during the Council in reference to that issue. The authors underlining the role of Mary as the Mother of the Church included a distinguished Mariology historian Henri Barré (Dittrich 2009, 498–500), as well as an outstanding patrologist Henri de Lubac (Dittrich 2009, 505–13). Essentially, Mariology on the eve of the Second Vatican Council was concerned with Mary's

new "titles of glory," with new dogmas, including the one related to Her spiritual motherhood (Napiórkowski 1989, 219).

2.2. The Title "Mother of the Church" at the Second Vatican Council

The broad panorama of issues widely discussed at the Second Vatican Council included the *De Beata* schema (Carbone 1988, 5; Grootaers 1996, 521; Jaśkiewicz 2025, 51), as well as the very title of Mary as the "Mother of the Church" (Carbone 1988, 5; Nadolski 1999, 117). The famous vote of 29 October 1963 not only put an end to a separate schema concerning Mary but also lowered the odds for handling the issue, postulated by numerous Council Fathers, of Her maternal protection over the Christian people. In such circumstances, the crucial role of Pope Paul VI during the Second Vatican Council revealed itself in full, as in its context, he proclaimed Mary the Mother of the Church.

2.2.1. The Mariological Schema

The Council schema titled, "Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of Men" was prepared by the Sub-Commission for the Church between July and November 1961 (Carbone 1988, 5; Grootaers 1996, 520; Laksito 2025, 404), and its first version was worded by a Croatian Franciscan Carlo Balić (Dittrich 2009, 581; Napiórkowski 1992, 18–19). In this schema, essentially representing the pre-Council Mariology, the part concerning Mary's spiritual motherhood mentioned the Mother of the Mystical Body (Napiórkowski 1992, 22). The schema underwent successive rewordings, adopting a title, "On Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church" (*De Maria Matre Jesu et Matre Ecclesiae*) (Carbone 1988, 5; Dodd 2006, 330–31; Galot 1985, 123). Its fourth edition after a process of consultation and discussion, including rejection of the term "Mother of the Church" (Napiórkowski 2019, 393), received a title, "On Mary, the Mother of the Mystical Body" (*De Maria Matre Corporis Christi Mystici*) and was subject to further consultation, retitled once again as "Mary, the Mother of the Head and Mother of the members of the Mystical Body of Christ" (*De Maria, Matre Capitis et Matre Corporis Christi membrorum*), following

which it was discussed by members of the Theological Commission (Carbone 1988, 5; Napiórkowski 1992, 25–26). Upon following corrections, the title was changed to “On Mary, the Mother of God and Mother of Men” (*De Maria, Matre Dei et Matre hominum*), aimed at making it a more autonomous document (Napiórkowski 1992, 26). At its meeting in March 1962, the Theological Commission confirmed the autonomy of the schema (as opposed to it comprising chapter 5 of the *De Ecclesia* schema), renaming it as “On the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of Men” (*De Beata Virgine Maria Matre Dei et Matre hominum*) (Carbone 1988, 5), and the prologue contained a statement that Mary is called “the Mother of the Church” (Napiórkowski 1992, 26–28). The autonomy of the *De Beata* schema was backed as early as January 1963 by the Pontifical Coordination Commission appointed on 17 December 1962 by Pope John XXIII (Grootaers 1996, 521), and in April 1963, as a result of following works, the separate schema was titled: “On the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church” (*De Beata Maria Virgine Matre Ecclesiae*) (Polak 1999, 125); although its content was not changed in comparison with the one connected with the *De Ecclesia* schema, it still inspired concerns in many Fathers concerning the name and the Marian title “the Mother of the Church” itself (Napiórkowski 1992, 43).

The Council adopted its final decision on the autonomy of the Mariological schema on 29 October 1963 at the 57th General Congregation when, by slight majority of vote (40 votes), the Fathers decided in favour of inclusion thereof in the schema on the Church (Carbone 1988, 5; Grootaers 1996, 521; Hangler 2017, 113; Laksito 2025, 404; Napiórkowski 1992, 55; Usiadek 1992, 191).

As far as it can be said that the Mariological schema was also rejected due to the presence therein of a rather new and insufficiently substantiated title of *Mater Ecclesiae*, the actual reason, as rightly pointed out by Johann Roten, was aversion to neo-scholastic Mariology focused on privileges, as well as the loss of momentum by the ecclesiology of the *Mystici Corporis* on which that title was based (2015, 12–13). It is also surprising that the text most essential for the title of the Mother of the Church – John 19:25–27 – was not included in the discussion (Roten 2015, 15).

2.2.2. The contribution of Polish bishops

Even if written statements of Polish bishops at the preparatory phase of the Second Vatican Council do not mention Mary as the Mother of Church yet, there are still two mentions of the Mother of the mystical Body of Christ (*Mater mystici Corporis Christi*) in the postulates of Bishop Michał Bleharczyk and Bishop Karol Pękała (Królikowski 2007, 105). Much attention was also paid to the universal mediation of Mary and her spiritual motherhood (Bartosik 1993, 35–65). During the first session of the Council, in the context of the preliminary debate of the *De Ecclesia* schema and inclusion therein of the *De Beata* schema, Bishop Karol Wojtyła, in his written substantiation, stressed the maternal function of the Church, referencing Mary who is the Mother of the Head and the Mother of all members of the Body, and thus the Mother of the entire Church, and it is to Her that we owe the internal unification of the mystical Body of Christ (Carbone 1988, 5; Dittrich 2009, 589; Hauke 2019, 26; Królikowski 2007, 106). During the second session of the Council, the understanding of Mary as the "Mother of the Church" was referenced by Archbishop Józef Gawlina in his short statement, pointing out that it remains in connection with the issue of Mary's mediation and with Her comprising the model of a human being wanted by God Himself (Królikowski 2007, 107). The "Mother of the Church" should be presented as an example and model for people, and thus could be recognized by Protestants. On the other hand, the substantiation of the title "Mother of the Church" was the focus of a written statement by Bishop Kazimierz Józef Kowalski of Chełmno, who presented patristical arguments, ones derived from papal teaching, and also referenced the evolution of the consciousness of the faithful in reference to their bond with Mary (Bartosik 1993, 96; Królikowski 2007, 108). Mary Mother of the Head and Mother of the members was also mentioned by Antoni Pawłowski, the Bishop of Włocławek, in his personal remarks submitted in writing. Under the position of the Polish Episcopate, also presented by that bishop in writing, Bishop Karol Wojtyła and Bishop Jan Jaroszewicz signed their supplementary note, emphasizing the connection of Mary as the Mother of the Church with the internal nature of the Church, with its Christological aspect which finds its fullest expression in the doctrine

of the mystical Body of Christ (Królikowski 2007, 108–10). In the statement under consideration, according to Królikowski (2007, 110), it is also worth stressing the inner connection of the teaching on the Mother of the Church with the teaching on the Mother of Men and the Mother of God's grace, leading to a better demonstration of the mystical nature of the Church and of Mary's motherhood with regard to the Church in its own right, which, on its part, is a model for the motherhood of the Church referred to as "the Mother" (Jaśkiewicz 2023, 123).

The most significant Marian statement of Polish bishops is considered to be the speech by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński of 16 September 1963, at the 81st General Congregation of the third session of the Council (Królikowski 2007, 110). Already on September 4, as Vincenzo Carbone emphasizes, Cardinal Wyszyński, on behalf of the Polish Episcopate, sent a request to the Holy Father to consecrate all humanity to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and also to recognize the Marian title "Mater Ecclesiae" or one of the equivalent titles "Mater unionis" or "Mater populorum" (Carbone 1988, 5). During the discussion in the auditorium speaking on behalf of 70 Polish bishops, Wyszyński notified the Council Fathers that the Episcopate of Poland had submitted a request to the Bishop of Rome, in the form of a letter (including the *Memorial* and *Libellus*), to bestow the dogmatic authority upon the spiritual motherhood of Mary with regard to the entire humankind and to subject the Church and humanity to the protection of the Mother of God and attributing to Her the title "Mother Church" (Carbone 1988, 5; Hauke, 2019, 25; Jaśkiewicz 2025, 54–57; Królikowski 2007, 119). Consequently, he summarized its content, presented the substantiation of the request, referencing e.g. Mary's mediation, and, in reference to the title "Mother of the Church," although he did not advocate introduction thereof into the Mariological chapter (Bartosik 1993, 177), he nevertheless asked that the belief of Mary being the "Mother of the Church" be bestowed with the dogmatic and pastoral value and that the entire Church be subjected to the maternal protection of Mary in a collegial and common act (Carbone 1988, 5; Jaśkiewicz 2025, 56; Królikowski 2007, 105; Napiórkowski 1992, 104). The reference to Mary the Mother of the Church, standing under the cross of Jesus, was

also a part of Archbishop Gawlina's opposition, during the 82nd General Congregation, to the thesis that development of Mariological issues is an obstacle on the way to ecumenism (Królikowski 2007, 112–13). The role played by Mary in the Church was presented by Archbishop Karol Wojtyła in remarks submitted in writing as an argument in favour of placing of the chapter on Mary in the beginning of the schema on the Church (Królikowski 2007, 114).

Even if the initiatives of the Polish bishops failed to contribute to the introduction of the title of "Mother of the Church" into the text of Chapter VIII of the constitution *Lumen gentium*, they had an unquestionable influence on the decisions of Pope Paul VI. Grzegorz Bartosik cites several testimonies to support this belief: those of Monsignor Vincenzo Carbone, who worked in the Secretariat of the Council; those of Bishop Bronisław Dąbrowski from his audience with Pope Paul VI, which took place in March 1965; the words of Pope Paul VI himself from the evening audience on November 21, 1965, granted to Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński; as well as the words of Cardinal Villot from the letter of the Holy See to Cardinal Wyszyński dated November 9, 1970 (Bartosik 1993, 178–81).

2.2.3. Chapter 8 of the Constitution *Lumen gentium*

A turning point in the development of a new Mariological approach by Vaticanum II, as well as the beginning of the history of Chapter 8 of the *Lumen gentium* constitution, was the final decision to include the *De Beata* schema in the *De Ecclesia* schema (De Fiores 2013, 15). Resignation of the hitherto schema was related to development of a new proposal of the text, based on the study by a Belgian professor from Louvain, Fr. Gerard Philips, known as the "elementary test" (so-called *tentamen elementarium*), who was also chosen to be Balić's closest collaborator. The text by Philips had passed the stage of five editions before it was transferred first to the Theological Sub-Commission and then to the Theological Commission (Napiórkowski 1992, 80). As in the case of the autonomous *De Beata* schema, the title *Mater Ecclesiae* was supported by Father Balić who, as pointed out by Napiórkowski (1992, 93–95), ultimately did not insist to preserve it when confronted with Philips's position.

The discussion of the schema under preparation, as the eighth chapter of the schema on the Church, lasted for three days during the third session of the Council: on 16, 17, and 18 September 1964, and spanned three consecutive General Congregations: 81st, 82nd, and 83rd (Carbone 1988, 5; Napiórkowski 1992, 97). Among those speaking, particular advocates of the title “Mother of the Church,” postulating restoration thereof in the text of Chapter 8 *De Ecclesia*, included: Rafael García y García de Castro, the Archbishop of Granada (Napiórkowski 1992, 99–100), Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini (Napiórkowski 1992, 101), Spanish Bishop Laureano Castán (Napiórkowski 1992, 18–19). The opponent of the title, particularly due to its supposed novelty, was the Mexican bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo from Cuernavaca (Napiórkowski 1992, 107–8). At the end of the third session of the Council, in the vote of 29 October 1964, the Council Fathers opted in favour of introducing no amendments whatsoever to the developed text of Chapter 8 *De Ecclesia*, not including the title *Mater Ecclesiae* (Carbone 1988, 5; Jones 2023, 6; Wollny 1995, 46). According to the account by Edward Schillebeeckx, there were only 24 votes unambiguously in favour of the inclusion of the title *Mater Ecclesiae*, whereas the majority, as much as 1559 votes, rejected all amendments and 521 voted in favour of a range of changes (Schillebeeckx and Halkes 1993, 15).

The new perspective of Mariology revealed itself since the very title of Chapter 8: “The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and Church,” as well as since its first point focused on the Divine mystery of salvation (De Fiores 2013, 16; Grootaers 1996, 521; Kochaniewicz 2001, 238; Wojtczak 2010, 276). The title *Mater Ecclesiae* does not appear directly in the text of Chapter 8 of *Lumen gentium* (Amato 1987, 5; Borowski 2022, 458; Galot 1985, 123; Garonne 1988, 71; Pach 2002, 133–34), although light is shed on it in thirteen passages teaching with predilection on Mary’s motherhood (Galot 1985, 123; Łaszewski 1992, 197–98), and in a call for reverence the Church should show to Mary as the beloved Mother of the Church (Hauke 2019, 31). The Mariological chapter of *De Ecclesiae* expresses the importance of the teaching on the relationship between Mary and the Church through referring to Mary, following in the footsteps of St. Augustine, as “the mother of the members

of Christ,” as well as in the statement that “The Catholic Church [...], honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother” (*LG* 53; cf. Dittrich 2009, 661n; Graber 1991, 69; Łaszewski 1992, 196). Jean Galot recalls there was no lack of attempts to remove the latter passage from the final wording at the stage of edition (1985, 123). Passage 62 presents Mary’s maternal function with regard to the Church (Graber 1991, 90).

2.2.4. Proclamation of Mary as the Mother of the Church

Pope Paul VI was an ardent supporter of honouring Mary with the title of the Mother of the Church, which he had already expressed as Cardinal Giovanni Montini, first on 8 September 1959, in his encouragement for the Milan Diocese to prepare properly for the Council (Jones 2023, 6; Roten 2015, 18), and then on 5 December 1962, speaking at the first session of the Council and, in a way, supporting the motion presented a day before by Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens (Polak 1999, 124; Wojtkowski 1969, 322; Wollny 1995, 46). As the Pope – in his homily delivered in the basilica of St. Mary Major at the beginning of the second session on 11 October 1963 – he expressed a wish for Mary to be considered the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church, and our Mother within the grand vision of the Church (Shea 1965, 23; Wojtkowski 1969, 322); whereas on 4 December 1963, encouraging unanimity, he expressed the readiness to bestow Mary with the title *Mater Ecclesiae* (Paul VI 1964, 37; cf. Carbone 1988, 5; Jones 2023, 6; Królikowski 2007, 111; Usiadek 1992, 240–41; Wojtkowski 1969, 323; Wollny 1995, 46). The position of Pope Paul VI concerning the title “Mother of the Church” was largely affected by the deliberations on the Church by Henri de Lubac (Dittrich 2009, 688). On the other hand, as pointed out by Gloria Falcão Dodd, Pope Montini considered Paul the Apostle the essential source for Mary’s motherhood with regard to the Church (Romans 12:3–5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–37). The Pope did not impose his position on the Council in any way, although he presented the intent to honour Mary as early as his first encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (Shea 1965, 24–26). The title “Mother of the Church” ultimately did not appear in the Constitution on the Church and other documents of the Vaticanum II, and the postulate of numerous Council Fathers

would itself be reflected in the speech by Pope Paul VI of 21 November 1964: “Therefore, for the glory of the Virgin Mary and for Our own consolation, We proclaim the Most Blessed Mary Mother of the Church, that is to say of all the people of God, of the faithful as well as of the Pastors, who call her the most loving Mother. And We wish that the Mother of God should be still more honored and invoked by the entire Christian people by this most sweet title” (Paul VI 1964; cf. Amato 1987, 5; Borowski 2022, 458; Carbone 1988, 5; Dodd 2006, 331; Jaśkiewicz 2025, 49; Napiórkowski 2024a, 13; Piotrowski 1994, 123; Usiądek 1992, 241–42; Wojtkowski 1969, 323). The formula “we proclaim,” as used by the Holy Father, does not confer the rank of a dogma on this statement (Pek 2009, 81). It should be noted that the proclamation of Mary as the Mother of the Church was met with great enthusiasm and applause from the Council Fathers (Carbone 1988, 5; De Mattei 2010, 448–49), but also with unfavourably by some Protestant theologians, such as Pastor Richard-Molard (Jones 2023, 8) or the Lutheran theologian Martin E. Marty (Shea 1965, 22). The Orthodox Church looks with concern at the title “Mother of the Church” as well, since, rather than a mother, it sees Mary as the personification of the Church, and rather than the Mother of the Church, it emphasizes Mary’s motherhood within the Church (Kniazeff 1996, 159–61; Napiórkowski 2019, 210–11).

Considering the reservations towards the Marian title “Mother of the Church” which had been best evidenced by the Council sessions themselves, Pope Paul VI based his decision on a valuable explanation in which, distinguishing two dimensions of the Church – the hierarchical, institutional, sacramental, visible one as well as the spiritual, mystical, sanctifying, invisible one, he based the title of “Mother of the Church” on the latter (Łaszewski 1992, 197).

Another significant papal act within the context of recognition of Mary as the Mother of the Church was consecration, during a solemn Mass at the end of the Second Vatican Council on 8 December 1965, of a cornerstone for a new church in Rome, dedicated exactly to Mary as the *Mater Ecclesiae* (Królikowski 2007, 118–19; Wollny 1995, 47).

3. Discussion: The Post-Council Reception of the Title “Mother of the Church”

Following the Second Vatican Council, the Marian title “Mother of the Church” appeared not only in the official teachings of the subsequent popes but also in deliberations of numerous theologians. Whereas the papal teaching sets forth a new framework of Mariological considerations and includes this Marian title in the deposit of faith, numerous theological discussions lead to development of a strictly defined theological significance of the title. It should be rightly noted, following Adam Wojtczak, that after Vaticanum II, the title of *Mater Ecclesiae* saw deepened studies, including interpretations from the viewpoints: biblical and dogmatic, patristic, documents of the Magisterium of the Church, liturgical, pastoral, as well as ecumenic (2010, 269–70). It was also included in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in the paragraph “Mary – Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church” included in the article “I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church” (Kaldon 2009, 162; Roten 2015, 21–22). The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith draws attention to the special relationship between the Mother of the Church and the Holy Spirit in its Note *Mater Populi fidelis* (MPF 38), in reference to the statements of Pope Francis.

3.1. The Papal Teaching

The great enthusiasm of Pope Paul VI for the Marian title “Mother of the Church” finds confirmation in his numerous statements, beginning, in particular, from the *Signum Magnum* apostolic exhortation issued on 13 May 1967 on the fiftieth anniversary of the revelations of the Mother of God in Fatima (Carbone 1988, 5; Wojtkowski 1969, 323; Wollny 1995, 47). The title “Mother of the Church” not only appears in the title of that document but comprises a frequent point of reference and serves as encouragement to entrust oneself to the Mother of the Church (Dittrich 2009, 702). The merit of Pope Montini is inclusion of this Marian title into the solemn confession of faith, made at the end of the Year of Faith and celebrations of the 1900th anniversary of the martyrdom of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul on 30 June 1968 (Paul VI 1968; cf. Dittrich

2009, 711; Wojtkowski 1969, 323; Wollny 1995, 47). The providential Mother of the Church in the revised texts of the Missal is mentioned by Pope Paul VI in the *Marialis cultus* apostolic exhortation (*MC* 11; cf. Carbone 1988, 5).

In a way, another chapter of teaching on the Mother of the Church is included in numerous statements by Pope John Paul II. Since the very beginning of his pontificate, not only did the Polish Pope frequently use the title “Mother of the Church” but he also taught to trust the Mother of the Church (Johannes Paul II 1980, 13–14; cf. Carbone 1988, 5). On his initiative, 1980 saw addition of the title “Mother of the Church” to the Litany of Loreto (Łaszewski 1992, 196); in 1981, he had a *Mater Ecclesiae* mosaic made on the corner wall of the Apostolic Palace (Dodd 2006, 323), and the *Collectio Missarum BVM*, completed in 1987, contains three special Masses titled “Image and Mother of the Church.” Apparently, he confirmed the truth of the Mother of the Church in reference to the statements of his predecessor in his Marian encyclical: “Mary is present in the Church as the Mother of Christ, and at the same time as that Mother whom Christ, in the mystery of the Redemption, gave to humanity in the person of the Apostle John. Thus, in her new motherhood in the Spirit, Mary embraces each and every one in the Church, and embraces each and every one through the Church. In this sense Mary, Mother of the Church, is also the Church’s model” (*RM* 47; cf. Carbone 1988, 5). On 17 September 1997, John Paul II dedicated a delivered audience to Virgin Mary the Mother of the Church (John Paul 1997; cf. Dittrich 2009, 785n). In an apostolic letter on rosary, the Holy Father gives the following explanation of the function or objective of Mary as the Mother of the Church: “As such, she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son. She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the inexhaustible outpouring of the Spirit. Mary is *the perfect icon of the motherhood of the Church*” (*RVM* 15).

Pope Benedict XVI, while still being a cardinal, would read the fact of proclamation of the Marian title “Mother of the Church” as an attempt to counter the crisis which had manifested itself at the Second Vatican Council, between the supporters of ecclesio-centric Mariology and zealous representatives of Marian piety

(Ratzinger 1991, 16). In his papal homily on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, he referenced the unforgettable experiences at the moment of proclamation of Mary as the Mother of the Church, and he also stressed that the Mother of the Head is the Mother of the Church (Benedict XVI 2005). The German Pope understood the title "Mother of the Church" in reference to the Church, but also in a Christological and eschatological way: "The Mother of *Theós*, the Mother of God, is the Mother of the Church, because she is the Mother of the One who came to unite all in His resurrected Body" (Benedict XVI 2010).

In his very first encyclical, Pope Francis speaks of Mary's motherhood being extended at the foot of the cross to every disciple of Christ, then he addresses the Mother of the Church with a trusting prayer (LF 59–60). Similarly, in his first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, he speaks of the Mother of the Church which evangelizes (EG 284). To the maternal protection of Mary and the maternal calling of the Church, the Argentinian Pope devoted his Message for the 26th World Day of the Sick on 11 February 2018, the title of which includes the title "Mater Ecclesiae" (Francis 2018).

The intercession of Mary the Mother of the Church is referenced by Pope Leo XIV in his messages, such as the one directed to the participants in the National Conference of Pax Christi in the USA on 20 July 2025 (Leo XVI 2025a). The title "Mother of the Church" was included as a point of reference in the speech of Pope Leon XIV to the participants of the Congress of the Pontifical International Marian Academy on 6 September 2025 (Leo XIV 2025b).

3.2. The Mother of the Church in Theology and Liturgy as Well as in Marian Piety Following the Second Vatican Council

The Mariological crisis which manifested itself within the first decade since the Vaticanum II (Cecchin 2020, 71–75), in fact, did not fail to affect the subject matter of Mary the Mother of the Church either. Numerous theological discussions appeared in reference to this subject matter, both in Poland (Pek 2009, 223) and beyond its borders. There was also no shortage of authors not hiding their distrust of that title (Galot 1985, 119). In Poland, the discussions essentially

focused on the following issues: the motivation for proclamation of the Marian title “Mother of the Church” by Pope Paul VI? the extent of motherhood of the Mother of God with regard to the Church? The theological qualification of the title? (Wollny 1995, 46). The authors who had a particular contribution to a fuller and multifaceted demonstration of this title directly upon proclamation thereof include: a Belgian Jesuit theologian Jean Galot (1964, 1919–2008), a Spanish Jesuit José Antonio de Aldama y Pruaño, a German theologian and liturgist Walter Dürig, an Italian theologian Bruno Forte, and a German theologian Anton Ziegenaus (Roten 2015, 23). Immediately upon the proclamation of the title, Galot in his study showed its history, biblical and patristical basis more broadly, simultaneously encouraging not to oppose the motherhood of Virgin Mary to the motherhood of the Church but to read them mutually within each other (Galot 1964, 1163–85). In fact, the title “Mother of the Church” is neither derived from Mary’s maternal love for the Church nor signifying the psychological level of motherhood but based on Her most significant and most illustrious privilege of the Divine Motherhood (Galot 1964, 1167). Szymon Drzyżdżyk, presenting the theological substantiation for the title “Mother of the Church,” calls the title itself “a peculiar summary of the Council’s Mariological thought” (2008, 118). The latest and comprehensive study of the title “Mother of the Church” is the doctoral thesis by Achim Dittrich (2009).

The post-Council research of the subject matter of the Mother of the Church has primarily borne fruit in the form of valuable biblical studies. Augustyn Jankowski, presenting the biblical basis for the Marian title of Mother of the Church, focuses on Mary’s motherhood with regard to the Church (2004, 129). The interest in the title has significantly exceeded the boundaries of Catholic exegesis, as expressed by a 20th-century Anglican systematic theologian John Macquarrie (1977, 393–94), one of the first authors who has considered the title “Mother of the Church” as an indispensable guide for interpretation of Mary’s place in the New Testament, based on a strong biblical foundation. Mary’s motherhood is already foretold by the Old Testament “daughter of Zion” who was to give birth to the Messiah (Dittrich 2009, 997–1007). Some authors

regard the Mother of the Church as a new Rachel of the New Covenant (Pitre 2020, 192–98). Analyzing the biblical basis for Mary's motherhood with regard to the Church, Galot attempts to extract valuable guidance from the Gospels of Luke and John as well as the Acts of the Apostles to confirm the truth that the maternal role of Mary extends to the entire salutary work of Jesus Christ (1964, 1174–79). The place of the final maturation of Mary's motherhood in the Holy Spirit and Her calling to become the Mother of the disciples of Jesus was Her presence at the foot of the cross (John 19:25–27), which should be read symbolically as relating to the entire Church (Drzyżdzyk 2008, 118–19; Galot 1985, 126; Hareźga 2011, 34; Kałdon 2006, 172; Życiński 1997, 421–22). The fact of subjecting John to the maternal protection of Mary, and simultaneously John's acceptance of the gift of motherhood (John 19:26–27) is important evidence in favour of the title "Mother of the Church" (Drzyżdzyk 2008, 119). Other important evidence is Mary's presence at the Cenacle during the Pentecost (Acts 2:1–13) when Mary undertakes Her maternal mission with regard to the first community of the Church (Drzyżdzyk 2008, 119). The final, extremely important piece of evidence confirming the legitimacy of the title "Mother of the Church" is the pericope on the Woman and the dragon in Chapter 12 of Revelation of St. John, subject to both Marian and ecclesial interpretations. Mary present in the Church as the Mother of Christ is united with it, which means that, as the Mother, she partakes in its fate and personifies its full perfection in glory (Drzyżdzyk 2008, 120–21). It should also be noted that Mary's motherhood with regard to the Church is also pointed out by: the plan of action of the Holy Spirit, the wedding at Cana, the passages: John 1:13 and John 11:52 (Życiński 1997, 421, 423).

The Council's postulate to pay more attention to writings of authors of the Christian antiquity was also reflected in broader studies (Dittrich 2009, 21–75) or ones narrowed down to one or several ancient authors. The theory of recapitulation, crucial for the theology of Irenaeus of Lyon, allows Mary to be seen as the "new Eve," the "mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:20) (Galot 1985, 126; Życiński 1997, 424), particularly in Epiphanius of Salamis (Dittrich 2009, 23–27; Życiński 1997, 425). Irenaeus, juxtaposing Eve's

disobedience with Mary's obedience, will stress that Mary became the cause of salvation for the entire humankind (Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* III, 22, 4 [Irenaeus 1857, 959]) (Galot 1964, 1171). To Tertullian and Cyprian, it is the Church that is the mother necessary for salvation (Dittrich 2009, 27–32). Galot, in his overview of patristical foundations of Mary's spiritual motherhood, departs from the title "Mother of salvation" and sets it in the statement of St. Ambrose of Milan that Virgin Mary had conceived the salvation of the world and brought forth the life of all (*Virgo genuit mundi salutem, virgo peperit vitam universonum*; Ambrosius, *Epistola* 63,33 [Ambrosius 1845, 1198]) (Galot 1964, 1171; 1985, 126; Łaszewski 1992, 193–94). The awareness that Mary's motherhood extends beyond the person of Christ was also present in the works of certain Greek Fathers in the 5th century (cf. Severian of Gabala, Theodotus of Ancyra, Proclus of Constantinople; Galot 1964, 1172; Życiński 1997, 425). Although, on the other hand, one of the most outstanding representatives of Western Christianity, St. Augustine, presents Mary as a member of the Church, he also teaches about the Mother of the Saviour, who is the Mother of His members (*mater membrorum eius*: Augustinus, *De sancta Virginitate* 6 [Augustinus 1865, 399]). In the comprehensive interpretation of the thought of the Bishop of Hippo with regard to Mary, as noticed by Galot, one can ascribe three properties to Her: 1) She is a member of the Church due to Her relation to the Saviour; 2) the Mother of the Church due to Her relation to the faithful; and 3) a type and model of the Church (Galot 1964, 1074; 1985, 126–27; Życiński 1997, 426). Augustine himself may be called the "forefather of the idea of *Mater Ecclesiae*" (Dittrich 2009, 57). Johann Roten points out that, although awareness of the maternal nature of the Church was present in the patristic period (Tertullian, Cyprian), and Mary Herself was considered the "Mother of the Living" (*mater viventium*), neither Ambrosius nor Augustine adopt this title (2015, 6). Due to the plurality of references, Marek Gilski and Anton Adam point out the need of careful interpretation of St. Augustine's statements on Mary's motherhood resulting from the relation between Mary and Jesus (Gilski and Adam 2011, 42). Pope Leo the Great, emphasizing the virgin and Divine motherhood of Mary, also indicates Her motherhood with regard

to the Church, i.e., to all those with whom Christ has reunited Himself assuming the human nature, and to whom He remains the Head (Dittrich 2009, 62).

While the Holy Scripture and the statements of ancient authors provide the title "Mother of the Church" with its indispensable biblical and patristic context, theology provides it, in the first place, with a Christological and ecclesiological foundation (Łaszewski 1992, 198). Such a context of the title "Mother of the Church," as well as a deeper understanding of the Mary – Church relation and the plurality of aspects of Mary's motherhood render the previously advanced reservations groundless (Galot 1985, 127–30). There are essentially four issues encompassed, according to Anthony Padovano, by the theology of the title "Mother of the Church": 1) Mary as a disciple and the Mother of the Lord; 2) Mary as the Mother of the Lord's disciples; 3) Mary as a type of the Church; 4) Mary as the Mother of the Church (1966, 28). Drzyżdzyk, on the other hand, points out three aspects: 1) the Mother of the Church in the Church; 2) the Mother of the Church in relation to the Church; and 3) the Mother of the Church as the Church (2008, 124–26). Recapitulating the history and significance of the title *Mater Ecclesiae*, Johann G. Roten indicates five interpretation trends which have manifested themselves in reference to the title under consideration: 1) the mirror effect, consisting in the fact that just as the Church reads and explains itself in Mary, Mary likewise reads and explains Herself in the Church; 2) a personalist tendency connected with the spiritual and mystical relation between the Church understood as the mystical Body and Mary who receives a status of a collective personality; 3) the ecclesiological identification of the Church and Mary or both; 4) the central and decisive significance of the Christus-totus theology; 5) the existential desire of a mother (2015, 7–12). Wishing to specify in more detail how Mary's maternal mission with regard to the Church is expressed, Wojciech Życiński (1997, 429–30) first reminds that it is fully subordinate to Christ and expressed in the mediation of grace in the Church, in the concern for development of faith, and in aid in acceptance of the revealed truth. Janusz Królikowski (1992, 72), extracting the major theological content encompassed by the title "Mother of the Church" from the extensive

teaching of the Primate of the Millennium, will stress these include: “personality, activity, the ecclesial deaconry of love and, particularly accented and repeatedly stressed, the model nature”. Hans Urs von Balthasar pointed out in his study on Mariology and Marian piety that Mary, being the “Mother of the Church,” i.e., the Mother of Christ as the Head and of all of its members, is also our Sister which is best evidenced by Her presence in the community of saints (Balthasar 1991, 53–54). Mary, as the Mother of the Church on earth, is also the Mother of saints and the Mother of the deceased faithful (Haffner 2008, 330).

Even if modern Mariology, emphasizing Mary’s privileges, focuses rather on the aspect of service, and thus of ordinary closeness of Mary to all people, this still, as pointed out by Salvatore M. Perrella, does not encompass any diminishing of or disregard for the teaching on the Mother of the Church (2021, 72–73).

The mystery of Mary’s spiritual motherhood, and thus the title of the Mother of the Church itself, remains strictly connected to the mystical Body of Christ, to the fact of Mary being the Mother of Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body (Kaldon 2006, 168–69). Mary’s motherhood is no human motherhood, neither in the physical nor in the analogous meaning, but a maternal-like cooperation with God in implementation of His plans, participation in the foster-Fatherhood of God (Kaldon 2006, 171). Speaking of Mary the Mother of the Church, we cannot forget She is simultaneously the Daughter of the Church. Whereas, on the one hand, Mary as the Mother of Christ contributed to the birth of the Church, thus gaining the title of the Mother, on the other hand, she would grow in sanctity in that born Church as its most illustrious “Part,” due to which She is also called the “Daughter of the Church” (Napiórkowski 2019, 609). In spite of its limitations, the title “Mother of the Church” appreciates the social dimension of Mary’s spiritual motherhood (Napiórkowski 2019, 608).

Cathy Jones in her article presents the argument in favour of renewed pneumatological positioning of Mary’s motherhood in relation to the Church (2023, 1–12). Sr. Cathy Jones from England completed a doctorate on the relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit in the writings of René Laurentin at St Mary’s University in London,

and in the study under consideration, she undertakes the problem of a negative attitude and outright criticism from Eastern Christians, expressed as early as during the Council by Nikos Nissiotis, an Orthodox observer at the Council (Jones 2023, 1). Unlike Roman Catholicism, in the Eastern Church, the title "Mother of the Church" refers primarily to the Holy Spirit, as confirmed in the oldest evidence (the commentary to the Song of Songs by Bede the Venerable from early 8th century) (Jones 2023, 3). In earlier sources, Mary and the Church were so strictly interconnected that it was often difficult to tell which one of those subjects was referred to, or whether it was not both, like in case of the "Woman" from the Revelation (Jones 2023, 3). Evidence for identification of the Mother of the Church with the grace of the Holy Spirit is found in an early 13th-century *Distinctiones monasticae* by an anonymous English Cistercian (Jones 2023, 4–5). The same author, like Berengaud, claims that Mary is the Mother of the Church because She gave birth to its Head, and then he explains how Mary is both the Mother of Christ and Mother of Christians. In slightly later sources, Mary is presented essentially, like in the early Church, as a type of the Church and an individual mother of each Christian (Jones 2023, 4–5).

Jones's attention is focused on the post-Council allegation that ascribing titles to Mary, including "Mother of the Church," was supposedly appropriation of titles or attributes of the Holy Spirit (2023, 8–9). According to Jones, the most prominent among those who attempted to explain that issue were two Catholic theologians: René Laurentin and Heribert Mühlen (Jones 2023, 9). They approached the advanced reservations very seriously, often confirming their legitimacy, and in their postulates, shared by Schillebeeckx and Congar as well, they advocated the necessary appreciation of Mary's role in relation to the Holy Spirit, Her integral bond with Him, which ultimately allows one to speak of two "Mothers of the Church" (Jones 2023, 10–12).

Although documents of the ecumenical dialogue, drawn up by the Roman Catholic party with other Christian denominations in late 20th and early 21st century, do not say anything yet on the Mother of the Church, the subject matter of Mary's role as the Mother

of the Church is undertaken during ecumenical meetings as well (Napiórkowski 2024b, 775).

The title “Mother of the Church” has not gone unnoticed in post-Council liturgical accomplishments, which first became a fact through confirmation of a votive Mass on the Mother of the Church, submitted by the Order of Servants of Mary, and then through the efforts of the Episcopate of Poland led by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (Polak 1999, 127–28). One should stress numerous initiatives of the Episcopate of Poland (Pek 2009, 80–81) which, resisting the belittling of the worship of the Mother of God in the modern world and the struggle against Marian piety – were to serve broadening and deepening of the worship of the Mother of God, more solemn subjection of the entire Church to Mary the Mother of the Church by the Holy Father, as well as establishment of the feast of Mary the Mother of the Church. These postulates were particularly expressed in the *Letter of the Episcopate of Poland to Holy Father Paul VI on the worship of the Mother of God and subjection the Church to the protection of the Mother of Church* of 1 October 1969 (MOMK, 20–22). Due to the initiative of the Polish Episcopate, the invocation “Mother of the Church, pray for us” was first added to the Litany of Loreto, and subsequently, by special letter of 4 May 1971, the feast of Mary the Mother of the Church was proclaimed for the first time in the world (MOMK, 61–66; cf. Borowski 2022, 458; Dittrich 2009, 762; Hauke 2019, 26; Kochaniewicz 1998, 131–48; Łaszewski 1992, 196; Nowak 2009, 130; Pek 2009, 79), to be celebrated, by decision of the Holy See, on the Monday following the Pentecost (Pek 2009, 85). By special Memorial of 5 September 1971, the Episcopate of Poland also addressed 93 Catholic Bishops of the world, requesting them to subject the world to Mary the Mother of the Church (MOMK, 75–86). Presenting the titles of major letters of the Episcopate of Poland within less than fifteen years since the proclamation of the feast of the Mother of the Church in Poland, Kazimierz Pek points out that we find “the Polish theology of the title of the Mother of the Church” in them (2009, 80–81).

On 15 August 1986, the Congregation for Divine Worship proclaimed a typical edition of the *Collectio Missarum de Beata Maria Virgine* (Polak 1999, 131). Pope Francis decided to introduce

celebration of the memorial of Mary the Mother of the Church on the Monday following the Pentecost throughout the Church, which was expressed in a special Decree by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments of 11 February 2018 (Congregation 2018; cf. Hauke 2019, 26). On 13 January 2022, the Congregation confirmed the English translation of texts for memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2022).

The Marian title "Mother of the Church" contains the truth of the spiritual motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is of enormous significance to the Christian spirituality. Even if in the East, Orthodox theology undertook the subject of spiritual motherhood less frequently in comparison with the Divine motherhood, it was still present in the liturgy and piety (Galot 1964, 1182–83). The basis for Mary's spiritual motherhood is the testament from the cross (RM 24). Mary as the Mother of the Church is the model of apostleship to everyone (Kowalczyk 2012, 91–102). The spiritual motherhood of Mary the Mother of the Church is a model for the spiritual motherhood of the Church (Pałubska 2007, 98). An outstanding advocate of Mary's spiritual motherhood in 20th-century Poland was Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński.

The title "Mother of the Church" has found its way to Marian piety. In Italy, as early as 1963–1964, Servant of God Madre Maria Oliva Bonaldo, the founder of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Church, established two journals: *Ecclesia Mater*, undertaking the subject matter of Mary's presence in the Church, and *Mater Ecclesiae*, devoted to the role of Mary with regard to the Church (Amato 1987, 5). An outstanding worshipper of Mary's immaculate conception and Her motherhood with regard to the Church was a Polish Mariologist, today a Servant of God, Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki. In early 1960s, the title "Mother of the Church" from the Second Vatican Council was one of his particular inspirations for development of the charism of the established Light-Life Movement and the Crusade for the Redemption of Man (Gębala and Nowak 2014, 54–55).

The title "Mother of the Church" and the message contained therein, developed in the form of deliberations, meditations and

prayers, serves the development of spiritual life of individuals (Amorth 2013, 111–15; Jędraszewski 1994, 69–78; Muñoz 1996, 93–139; Patrizi 2019, 25–27; Pylak 2010, 161–62; Siudy 2000, 29–30; Wójtowicz 2013, 121–26), groups and communities [e.g. ones connected with the Oasis Movement in Poland (Chmielewski 2007, 159)] or experienced events (Institutum Marianum Regensburg 1975, 113–17; Materski 1991).

4. Conclusion

The 61 years which have passed since the memorable speech delivered by Pope Paul VI at the end of the 3rd session of the Second Vatican Council enable one to see Mary's title "Mother of the Church," proclaimed at that time, in a new light. This novelty primarily concerns the very proclamation of the Marian title by the Bishop of Rome as well as its broader context, i.e., the Council's teaching on the relation between Mary and the Church, which are better known today due to numerous available historical sources and their studies. They clearly confirm the fact that proclamation of Mary as the Mother of the Church was neither a matter of coincidence nor some kind of private initiative by Pope Montini, nor was it detached from the Council. The continuator of the idea of John XXIII was a great enthusiast of that title, and its proclamation was fostered primarily by requests of numerous Council Fathers to bestow a new rank on the Blessed Virgin Mary's exercise of Her maternal protection of the entire Christian people. The contribution of Polish bishops, with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński at the lead, was significant in this regard as well.

Proclaiming the new title, Pope Paul VI expressed very clearly the intent of this act, which was greater veneration of the Mother of God by the Christian people and its growth of piety towards Her. Even if the post-Council reception of that Marian title turned out to be a difficult and arduous process, especially in the beginning, it is the broader perspective that allows one to notice the positive aspects thereof as well. This is primarily about the presence of the title "Mother of the Church" in the official teaching of the Church at the turn of the 20th and 21st century, including the ordinary

magisterium of the successors of Pope Paul VI. Above all, the Marian title saw a more critical and elaborate biblical and patristical substantiation after the Vaticanum II. A new light was shed on the title of the "daughter of Zion," the biblical Rachel the Mother of Israel, the wedding at Cana, the testament from the Cross, the waiting for descent of the Holy Spirit, or the Woman and the dragon from the Revelation. The post-council study of the Fathers of the Church, although it failed to discover any pre-Berengarius usage of the title "Mother of the Church," it still revealed the doctrinal content from in the past, traditionally connected with that title: the analogy between Eve and Mary as well as between Mary and the Church, the virgin womb of Mary from which the Church has its source, the Church as the Bride of Christ and as His body, the spiritual motherhood of Mary. In the Middle Ages, the title "Mother of the Church" occurred in strict connection with other titles, also resulting from Mary's motherhood with regard to Christ and His salutary work. Based on biblical and patristic sources, the post-Council theology of the title "Mother of the Church" is grounded in the essential belief that Mary's motherhood is not only limited to Christ Himself (Mother of God) but also extends to His mystical Body (the Church). The post-Council development of Mariology of ecclesiotypical nature allowed presentation of Mary raised to heavenly glory, who does not stay above the Church but, as its Member and Type, carries out Her maternal mission with regard to the Church, without affecting in any way the superiority of God's action nor the truth that it is Christ who is the Head of the Mystical Body.

Of interest are the post-Council accomplishments in the Church's liturgical life, such as the feast of Mary the Mother of the Church, celebrated in Poland since 1971, and the memorial of Mary the Mother of the Church celebrated worldwide since 2018. The title "Mary, the Mother of the Church" found its way to the Litany of Loreto and became a source of inspiration for Christian spirituality, including in particular for certain persons or communities and initiatives undertaken thereby.

A demonstration of the current state of reception of the title "Mary the Mother of the Church" cannot omit the fact that many misunderstandings have arisen around it. They essentially date back

to the period of the Council debate when the title was received unfavourably by the Protestants and Orthodox Christians, and even by certain Catholic bishops for fear of such a reaction. Even if there are single voices favourable to this title, and the subject matter of the role of Mary as the Mother of the Church is also undertaken at ecumenical meetings, there are no noticeable signs of progress. In the context of dialogue with Orthodox Christianity, the necessary need to reconsider the pneumatological interpretation of Mary's motherhood with regard to the Church, as well as the relation to the title "Mother of the Church" referring to the Holy Spirit, manifested itself as well.

The Marian title *Mater Ecclesiae* is a focus of different perspectives: historical, biblical, patristical, doctrinal, theological, liturgical, devotional, spiritual, ecumenic – confirming its richness and multi-faceted nature, which should be treated integrally.

Maryjny tytuł „Matka Kościoła” w kontekście Soboru Watykańskiego II i jego recepcja

Abstrakt: W opublikowanej w 2025 r. Nocie Doktrynalnej *Mater Populi Fidelis* Dykasteria Nauki Wiary zachęca do zwrócenia większej uwagi na precyzyjne użycie, właściwe znaczenie i interpretację tytułów i wyrażeń odnoszących się do Maryi (MPF 2). W odpowiedzi na to wezwanie niniejszy artykuł analizuje maryjne dziedzictwo Soboru Watykańskiego II, koncentrując się na tytule Maryi „Matki Kościoła”. Tytuł ten został omówiony metodą porównawczą, która uwzględnia dokumenty ogłoszone przed Soborem Watykańskim II oraz w trakcie obrad soborowych wraz z jego uroczystą promulgacją. Trzeci rozdział analizuje posoborową recepcję tego tytułu maryjnego w powszechnym nauczaniu papieskim, teologii, liturgii i pobożności maryjnej. We wnioskach przedstawiono kluczowe elementy procesu recepcji, a także wciąż utrzymujące się trudności dotyczące tytułu „Matka Kościoła”.

Słowa kluczowe: Matka Kościoła, Sobór Watykański II, papież Paweł VI, duchowe macierzyństwo

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