

Mary, Gender, and Politics after Vatican II

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Abstract: In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the most transformative event in the modern history of the Catholic Church, conservative Catholics the world over found themselves in a changed world and a changed Church. Modernizing reforms in the Church meant the revisiting and revising of longstanding Catholic tradition, from mass to the catechism. Conservative and right-wing theologians were especially concerned about certain potential changes to Church doctrine, particularly the veneration and status of Mary. Mary and her veneration were risky things to change for the Church, because, for centuries, Mary had served as a symbol of traditional femininity, as a nationalist icon, and as a popular beacon connecting Church and congregants. This article looks at how the potential and real changes to Marian devotion in the mid-twentieth century disturbed conservative and right-wing Catholic theologians in Latin America and Iberia, and explains how Marianism was for them a bellwether of the conservative nature of the Church, both as a representative of traditional norms and as a partisan bulwark against communism.

Keywords: Vatican II, Marianism, Latin America, Argentina, Right-Wing

The Church has as its mission raising its children to perfect union with Christ, to participate in his praising the Father, with Him and in Him. Mary acts to move the Church in the same direction. Mary's acts are the acts of the salvation of Christ which permeates the Church, which was founded with Her.

– Monseñor Enrique Alvear, *Reflexiones Sobre la Pastoral Mariana en Chile*¹

This text appears in an article called “Reflections on the Marian Pastoral in Chile,” published in the Chilean theological journal *Teología y Vida* in late 1964.² Stripped of their context, these words could be read as theological musings on the nature of the Church, something appropriate to the ivory tower or a seminary classroom, divorced from the real world in which Catholic parishioners lived their lives. Theology might seem disconnected from the lives of the laity, but this article shows how questions about how the Church and its Latin American members should venerate Mary were closely connected to discussions of the family, celibacy, divorce, contraception, the specter of female ordination, and even anticommunism. Arguing over the particulars of Mariology and Marianism wasn’t esoteric, but rather a serious contest over gender and the family. Marian veneration was an important part of the gender politics of the Church, a facet of the “feminization” of the Church.³ Marian devotion connected the divine with the everyday, connected the social with the individual, and the political with the personal. References to Mary were both a means by which right-wing Latin American Catholic commentators could connect to their readers and a guide for proper Catholic living.

1. Mons. Enrique Alvear U, “Reflexiones Sobre la Pastoral Mariana en Chile,” *Teología y Vida* (1964): 180–186.

2. Alvear U, “Reflexiones Sobre la Pastoral Mariana,” 180–186.

3. Jan Art, Patrick Pasture, and Thomas Buerman, “The Cult of the Virgin Mary, or the Feminization of the Male Element in the Roman Catholic Church? A Psycho-Historical Hypothesis,” in *Beyond the Feminization Thesis: Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe*, ed. Patrick Pasture (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 73–83.

The role of Mary in the Church was particularly relevant to debates in the Catholic Church through the 1960s and 1970s due to the influence of the Second Vatican Council. During the Council's deliberations and later, as its conclusions changed Catholic politics and practice, there were significant tensions between different theological and social interpretations of Mary's position in the Church. Two questions – with respect to the veneration of Mary, or Marianism, and the theology of Mary, or Mariology – occupied the Council and its observers. This article follows these discussions among conservative Catholics, primarily in Argentina and Chile in the mid-twentieth century. Following these threads from theology to domestic and international politics shows how theological debates had become intertwined with political issues that ranged from the Cold War to family planning. This article will focus particularly on the mid-1960s, immediately before and after the release of the Conciliar documents dealing with Mary, with additional material considered to illustrate the longstanding nature of this rhetoric. For these conservative Catholics, Mariology needed to be respected as a major part of Catholic thought, and Marianism had to be held up as vital to everyday Catholic life, particularly as it pertained to issues of gender and the family. This article will show that, having had neither of these desires met by the Second Vatican Council, conservative theologians, priests, and lay leaders used their positions in the media and the Church to promote the idea of focusing on Mary as an important way to differentiate themselves from both non-Catholic Christians and progressive Catholics.

Mary's veneration had long been a contested issue in the Church. Her status as intermediary between the human and divine was a major part of the Protestant Reformation, and her veneration was connected to debates over iconography which date back to the Great Schism that separated the Eastern and Western Churches.⁴ It has also historically been a point of contention between “higher” and “lower” forms of Catholicism, with the veneration of Mary being associated with laypersons and especially laypeople in peripheral geographic areas, such as the Americas.⁵ Most predominantly Catholic nations in Latin America were host to their own Marian patron, such as Mexico's Virgin of Guadalupe, Guatemala's Lady of the Rosary, Argentina's Lady of Luján, and Brazil's Lady of Aparecida. Along with other divine signs, these apparitions – often taking the phenotypic characteristics of local or even specifically indigenous peoples – allowed laypersons to identify with the divine.⁶ Marian veneration lay at the confluence of the Catholic Church's status as a universal (that is, “Catholic”) institution and the myriad of local practices, saints, and traditions that one would expect of a global organization with almost two thousand years of history.⁷

Since the Council of Ephesus in 431, which affirmed that Mary had given birth not just to a man, Jesus, but to God, Mariology has received relatively little attention in ecumenical councils, but it has been an important part of Catholic education from the parish to the seminary. Through the nineteenth century, Marian devotion remained an important part of the spiritual lives of many Catholics the world over, with

4. Brett Whalen, “Rethinking the Schism of 1054: Authority, Heresy, and the Latin Rite,” *Traditio* 62 (2007): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0362152900000519>.

5. Linda B. Hall and Teresa Eckmann, *Mary, Mother and Warrior: The Virgin in Spain and the Americas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004) and Eduardo P. Hontiveros, “The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Second Vatican Council,” *Philippine Studies* 13, no. 3 (1965): 652–669.

6. John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674067608>.

7. For further discussion see Hontiveros, “The Blessed Virgin Mary,” 652–669; A. D. Wright, *The Early Modern Papacy: From the Council of Trent to the French Revolution 1564–1789* (London: Routledge, 2016); R. Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770*, 2nd ed, *New Approaches to European History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); William A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691241906>; Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire: A New View of the Counter-Reformation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1977).

Marian shrines flourishing throughout the Christian world from antiquity to the modern era, such as the Marian shrine in Lourdes, France.⁸ The dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption had solidified Mary's place in Catholic teaching, but still, the question of her centrality remained.

In the mid-twentieth century, Marian devotion remained an everyday part of the life and worship of many Catholics worldwide, not least in Latin America. Marian devotion was featured in numerous articles in the *Revistas Eclesiásticas* of the dioceses of Santiago and Buenos Aires, magazines run by the clergy that documented the comings and goings of priests, published papal speeches, and distilled theological questions for an informed lay audience. The *Revista* of Buenos Aires featured articles about Argentines joining other Catholics in the celebration of a "year of Marian devotion" in 1954. Quoting Pope Pius XII, it encouraged readers to "continuously meet with the multitudes of the faithful who, not just privately, but publicly and with one soul send up praises to our most sweet Mother."⁹ Noting that the full, original name of the city of Buenos Aires (Puerto de Santa Maria de Buenos Aires) is itself a reference to Mary, the journal hoped that the city would continue in this tradition of being "entirely devoted to Our Lady." Santiago's counterpart magazine, the *Revista Eclesiástica de Santiago*, echoed this sentiment fifteen years later by reprinting the opening speech of the Third General Episcopal Conference of Latin America, held in Mexico. The entire speech is devoted to Mary and the "eminent Marian tradition" brought to the Americas by European colonizers. Marianism caught hold of the peoples of the Americas so strongly that each country, region, and even town had its patron Mary, an "endless list."¹⁰

In the 1960s the status of Mary and Marianism were key questions during the Second Vatican Council. How central to Catholic practice would Mary remain? What role would Marianism have to play in the question of women's power and position within the Church? What would this imply for the gender politics that pervaded right-wing thought? And finally, for those in the Church who hoped that the Council would challenge the boundary between Catholics and other Christians, how would this be possible without moving away from the saintly cults that had partially defined that split in the middle and early modern ages?

In the end, the Council chose a middle ground in these debates. Marianism was not addressed in a separate, dedicated document, but was instead the focus of the final section of the Council's most influential document, *Lumen Gentium*, which primarily addressed questions of ecclesiology and reforming the relationship between the laity and the hierarchy.¹¹ The section on Mary, chapter eight, was a compromise. It neither fulfilled the hopes of Marian devotionists who wanted the Church to strengthen its commitment to her as a "Mediatrice" between God the Father and humankind or as the "Co-Redemptrix" alongside Christ, nor did it concede to those who hoped that Marian devotion would be de-emphasized in an effort to modernize the Church.¹² Instead, Mary's "subordinate" position relative to the Lord was emphasized, while also singling her out as being unique among the faithful for her dedication to her Son and the Father of her child, a position with clear "real world" implications for the idealized role of women in the family. Yet

8. François Roy, "The Meaning of Lourdes," *The Furrow* 9, no. 2 (1958): 79–89. Due to the nature and scope of this article the 1,500-year history of Marian devotion between Ephesus and the era of Vatican II will not be discussed. For more on this subject see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) and Hilda C. Graef, *The Devotion to Our Lady* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963).

9. Santiago Luis Copello, "Sección Oficial del Arzobispado de Buenos Aires," *Revista Eclesiástica de Buenos Aires* (1954): 438–443.

10. O.R., "María: el comienzo de un mundo mejor," *Revista Eclesiástica de Santiago* (1979): 41–43.

11. "Light of Nations" in Latin. Also known as *The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*. In accordance with tradition when referencing Conciliar documents, *Lumen Gentium* is referred to by the first few words of the text in their original Latin.

12. Hall and Eckmann, *Mary, Mother and Warrior*.

those skeptical of Marian devotionism were disappointed by the extent to which her separation from other Christians was maintained, by the acceptance of previous documents¹³ describing her own immaculate conception and her lack of any sin or failing that would put her on the same level as other humans.¹⁴ For the conservative commentators in this article, that was an attack on one of the most foundational aspects of Catholic tradition.

However, wrangling over Mary and her position in the Church did not stop at the Vatican or with the Council's decisions. Conservative and right-wing Catholic publications in Latin America were deeply concerned over these changes and what they might mean for the Church. By the Council's conclusion, articles were noting that "it is a widespread opinion that the veneration of Mary has been prohibited by the Council," indicating what these right-wing Catholics considered to be the serious threat posed by the Council's decisions for Marian devotion.¹⁵ Their attention to these questions indicates both an earnest concern over potential changes to one of the most beloved traditional parts of Catholic practice as well as serious questions about the real-life topics Marianism was connected to.

These debates played a significant role in how conservative and right-wing Catholics in Latin America talked about social issues including divorce, birth control, and women's roles in society, in addition to changes to the Church. Apart from these social questions, Marianism touched on grand narratives of civilizational decline, and particularly the infiltration of both nations and the Church by communist forces. Anxieties over the reduction in emphasis on Marian devotion fed directly into polemics over the dissolution of the Church and their nations. While scholars today rightly point out that it is reductive to rely too heavily on Mary as an image of womanhood in Latin America, conservative and right-wing commentators – themselves invariably male – were deeply invested in precisely reducing femininity to service and motherhood.¹⁶ While the connections between gender discourse and right-wing governments in the Southern Cone have been the focus of numerous informative texts, these have focused on the use of gender in the construction of the subversive other.¹⁷ Instead, this article will focus on connections between the theological wrangling during and after Vatican II and how this informed conservative and right-wing gender politics, not just as it related to their enemies but to society as a whole.

Mary Mattered

Many sources of Catholic political and religious writing mused heavily about Mary and her place in the contemporary Catholic world. For the Catholic clergy and laity of the mid-twentieth century, these questions were not merely academic, thus they were neither rarefied and incomprehensible nor abstract and

13. See Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Papal Encyclicals Online, December 8, 1854, updated February 20, 2020, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>.

14. Hall and Eckmann, *Mary, Mother and Warrior*; Art, Pasture, and Buerman, "The Cult of the Virgin Mary."

15. S.E.R. Mons. Rudolf Graber, "El puesto de María en la Iglesia," *Roma* no. 8, (1969): 10–18.

16. Marysa Navarro, "Against Marianismo," in *Gender's Place: Feminist Anthropologies of Latin America*, ed. Rosario Montoya, Lessie Jo Frazier and Janise Hurtig (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 257–272; Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood: Maternity and Women's Rights in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

17. Margaret Power, "The Engendering of Anticommunism and Fear in Chile's 1964 Presidential Election," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 5 (2008): 931–953; Valeria Manzano, "Sexualizing Youth: Morality Campaigns and Representations of Youth in Early 1960s Buenos Aires," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 4 (2005): 433–461; Valeria Manzano, "Sex, Gender and the Making of the 'Enemy Within' in Cold War Argentina," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 1–29.

detached from the problems of the real world. Instead, the Marian question touched on, and even stood in for, a number of political commitments regarding everyday questions in everyday people's lives.

Mary and her position in the Church mattered greatly to conservative Catholic commentators in Argentina and Chile during and after the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council. A short piece titled "María, Madre de la Iglesia" was published in the August 1964 edition of the *Revista Eclesiástica de Buenos Aires* in between lengthy translations of Papal decrees and other articles, such as one on how to run a business in line with Catholic values. The article's author, a clergyman, noted the special place Mary held at the Basilica in Rome, and made his position on the Marian question extremely clear: The language used to refer to Mary by the Church fathers revealed her proper position in the Church. The author quoted Church fathers such as St. Augustine saying that "Mary physically embodied the head of the mystic body [of the Church] and the Church spiritually embodies this in its members."¹⁸ This connected the perspective of this magazine directly to a particular interpretation of Mary's role, one in which she was vital not only as a popular figure among the faithful but also – and more importantly – in that her existence and holiness were fundamental to the Church itself. Mary, "essentially" identified with the Church, is the "only mediator between God and the humans under his care – "he who loves Mary must love the Church, just as he who loves the Church must love Mary."

In a later issue from August 1965 after the release of *Lumen Gentium* and its section on Mary, the *Revista* ran another piece regarding the place of the Virgin in the Church which explicitly called upon Catholics to "restore their devotion to Mary," to "gather [themselves], with trembling hands, around the images of Jesus and Mary."¹⁹ This is an explicit reference to perhaps the most public aspects of Marian devotion, the attendance and pilgrimage to places where her image had appeared to the faithful, and the time spent praying before her image in shrines and Churches. Mary is the "model of all Christian and human virtue," the human key to salvation, a perfect example for all to follow in her devotion to Christ.

The article went further noting that "We must restore in our hearts the cult of devotion to the Virgin."²⁰ This statement, although short and simple, is highly significant as it reveals a great deal about the state of the Church at the time. It first implied that the author considered the cult of the Virgin to have been eroded in recent memory, a clear reference to the debates over Marian devotion and the potential transition which was occurring within the Church to emphasize her role as intermediary of Christ's love, or as an example for all to follow. Second, the quote emphasized that specific sorts of Catholics were distinguished from one another by their Marian devotion, which was something else, something unique and special. This use of Marian devotion as a signifier of belonging and theological identity was a major part of many articles on Mary.

The *Boletín Eclesiástico del Arzobispado de Buenos Aires* was another official church publication which, while avoiding taking a position about where the Mariology of the Church would or should stand, dedicated particular attention to Mary and her position in the Church immediately before and during the deliberations of the Council. Published monthly and targeted towards an audience of local priests and engaged laity, the *Boletín* focused most of its writings on noting the comings and goings of the clergy throughout the Archbishopric of Buenos Aires and its environs, official messages from the archbishop, and advertisements for tailors who specialized in vestments or for new electric organs. Not an academic

18. Pope Paul VI, "María, Madre de la Iglesia," *Revista Eclesiástica de Buenos Aires* no. 80 (1964), 4253.

19. Pope Paul VI, "María, modelo perfecto de toda virtud humana y cristiana," *Revista Católica de Santiago* (1965), 4606.

20. Editors, "María Santísima y el Sacerdote," *Boletín Eclesiástico del Arzobispado de Buenos Aires* (1964), 1.

publication, the *Boletín* was intended for an everyday clerical audience in their actual practice and performance as clergy.

In the August 1964 issue of the *Boletín* the front-page story was “Holy Mary and the Priest.”²¹ Mary was the “confidant” of the priest, his ally in lonely contemplation of the Lord, in public performance of the mass, and within. “There are secrets, priestly secrets, which cannot be shared even with one’s own worldly mother [...] only the most holy, heavenly Mary can bear such secrets.”²² Mary was not only of benefit to priests but theologically above them, standing in relation to them in much the same way as she did to the laity. While priests were closer to God than laypersons, they were also vastly more burdened by the weight of the problems of the world, responsible for their flocks, for maintaining traditions and practices thousands of years old in the modern world. This relationship to Mary, seeing her as a savior of those who save, was another way the *Boletín* emphasized how priests were connected with their “inheritance” from Christ.

Moving from sources intended for a priestly audience to those that had both lay and clerical readers, *Teología y Vida*, the in-house academic journal of the Theology Department of the *Universidad Pontificia Católica de Chile*, was among the most prestigious theology journals in Latin America. Beginning publication in 1960, immediately after the announcement of the Second Vatican Council, *Teología y Vida* offers an insightful glimpse into the theological reactions of an influential group of Latin American scholars to the changes the Council would bring about in Catholic doctrine and practice. Like so many other theological sources from this period, the *Teología y Vida* paid special attention to Mary, publishing several articles on Marianism and its place in the world in 1964 and 1965. The 1964 issue of the journal published two articles on Mary, one on Mary in the Bible, and a second on Marian veneration in Chile.

In one article, “The Virgin in Biblical Theology,” the author noted that “Mariological studies have grown prodigiously in recent years,” adding to an admittedly already extensive collection of theological perspectives on Mary.²³ The article briefly recounted the theologies of Mary’s place in two of the Gospels, Luke and John. Luke’s position was that Mary, in her “supernatural maternity,” “embodied in her person the people of God” – so, not only did she represent Christianity’s spiritual and social body through her act of motherhood, but she also literally was this body. John’s emphasis on Mary’s place at the foot of the cross was the article’s second major point, leading back to the exploration of the idea of Mary as “Co-Redemptrix.” These efforts to emphasize the position of Mary in the Gospels was a visible attempt to support the case for maintaining, and even expanding, her position relative to other saints, clearly aligning the author with the traditionalists and positioning him against modernists and reformists.

Ultimately the author concluded that he agreed with St. Cyprian that “none can have God as their Father without having the Church as Mother” – yet he cautioned readers to remember that the “Maternity” of the Church was an embodied one in a particular human person, “Mary, the Mother of Jesus.” These perspectives were not unique or exceptional but rather the norm for Latin American Catholic thinkers at the time, and signal a concern that a decline in Marian devotion could indicate a moral loss. To the author of the piece the maintenance of Mary’s role in the Church was not only important, but vital to the maintenance of the Catholic faith. The second of the articles released in that year’s edition on the “Marian Pastoral in Chile” focused on presenting Mary as a “collaborator” in the mission of Christ, literally in “forming the People” (as in, the mystical body of Christ, the Church).²⁴ Mary was more than just the literal mother of

21. Editors, “Maria Santísima y el Sacerdote,” 1.

22. Editors, “Maria Santísima y el Sacerdote,” 2.

23. Beltrán Villegas, “La Virgen en la Teología Bíblica,” *Teología y Vida* 5 (1964): 159–168.

24. Alvear U, “Reflexiones Sobre la Pastoral Mariana,” 180–186.

Christ. She was his closest human ally, and therefore a close and necessary collaborator for those who served Christ on Earth. Christ “founded the Church with her” in his self-sacrifice on the cross.

Yet the article also noted the real “risks” of Marian devotion. Marian devotion could be “regional,” with its own forms, sites, and rites which did not translate from place to place: “such that, when moving from region to region, one might be left without a religion.”²⁵ While popular, Marian devotion could sometimes verge upon the “iconic,” a heresy condemned in ecumenical councils centuries ago and relating to the supposed veneration of images rather than divine presences and personalities. More perniciously dangerous than necessarily heretical, holding Mary in such high regard risked promoting her as a venerable person because she was popular, rather than trying to promote her popularity because she was venerable – in other words, it risked using Marian devotion as a crutch to attract parishioners who should be drawn to the Church by its mission and message rather than the popularity of a particular Marian apparition.

Thus the attention paid to Mary was both a defence and a warning for conservative Catholic commentators in Argentina and Chile – a defence of what they understood to be the Catholic tradition, and a warning about following what was popular among the laity when it should be the clergy and theologians leading the way. The tension between these two trends would inform theological writing on Mary throughout the middle of the twentieth century. This was particularly true of journals that were deeply Catholic but not officially connected to the Church or Catholic universities, and that weighed in on the question of Mary’s role in the Church somewhat more heavily than their academic or clerical counterparts.

One such publication, Argentina’s *Roma*, paid close attention to the outcome of Conciliar debates over Mary’s role in the Church, and specifically to “an important movement which longed for the institution of the dogma of the Marian mediation in the economy of the Redemption” – that is, Mary’s role as the intercessor between her son, Christ, and Catholic congregations and believers.²⁶ This would have been in line with the “already received truths of the Church” and what *Roma* already considered to be centuries of Catholic practice, particularly considering that the “liturgical feast of the Mediation” – that is, Mary’s mediation between Christians and God – had already been declared for January 21st by Pope Benedict XV in 1921.

Another article from *Roma* reprinted a section from Paul VI’s *Signum Magnum*, which they titled “Mary, the Banner of Unity.”²⁷ Referring to Mary as one who could unify all Latin American Christians was not a platitude – the bulk of this particular edition of *Roma* dealt with Protestants and their influence on Catholicism, and emphasized Mary’s example as a follower of Christ and Marian devotion as vitally important bulwarks against devolvement into Protestantism. When addressed through Mary, this anxiety about the “protestantization” of the Church links important moral and theological concerns in the Church – such as divorce, birth control, and the family in general – directly to these authors’ anxieties of the deprioritization of Marian devotion.

Despite this, and much to *Roma*’s consternation, the “minimalist” faction at the Council was the successful one. Rather than receiving a full document dedicated to her, Mary was referred to in a section of other documents. What was worse, these minimalists “drank strongly from the waters of the silence of those interested in preserving Marian devotion, to overcome the Rosary and diminish the cult of the Holy

25. Alvear U, “Reflexiones Sobre la Pastoral Mariana,” 184.

26. Alberto García Vieyra, “La meditación de María,” *Roma* no. 19 (1971): 10–21.

27. Pope Paul VI, *Signum Magnum*, May 13, 1967, accessed July 30, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19670513_signum-magnum.html.

Virgin.”²⁸ Since “the mediation of Mary and the praying of the Rosary contribute to put us on the path of faith and sacramental life,” this constituted nothing less than a crime against their fellow Catholics.²⁹

This “sinister anti-Marian propaganda” had infiltrated all corners of the Christian world, from the “cities to the countryside,” denying centuries of Christian tradition from Papal encyclicals to the documents promulgated by other ecumenical Councils.³⁰ By the time of Vatican II, it had infected, not just certain parts of the Catholic priesthood, but the Conciliar documents themselves. Here the text closes in on the section in *Lumen Gentium* which dealt with Mary’s role in the Church, noting that the text identified Christ as the “Mediator” of salvation for Catholics. And yet Mary herself was granted “her own, singular role in the economy of salvation” at Christ’s side – meaning that “if Jesus is the mediator between God and Man [...] reconciling the human race with God [...] if such is the role of Jesus then such and the same is the role of the Holy Virgin, united with Him in this role.”³¹ This “evidence” of Mary’s role in Christianity meant to the author, Alberto García Vieyra, that Mary’s place in the Church was clear: she was a Mediator, like Christ himself. The article went into Biblical and other theological precedents at length identifying Mary as such, as the “Mediatrice [sic], Advocate, Auxiliary and Salvation.”³²

Being the Mediatrice meant that Mary occupied a place between the faithful and Christ, as a literal mediator between divinity and humanity. This was clear both in her person, being the only person born without sin through the Immaculate Conception, and in the fact that she was taken immediately and bodily to heaven upon her death, in the Assumption. The problem was that despite the Second Vatican Council’s recognition of Mary’s central role and her importance to millions of Catholics, it still denied her the title of “Mediator,” based on the claim that this would have been a simple “reduction” of the myriad definitions given of her place in the Church. This muddying of the waters of Catholic traditions and practices that predated the Council by centuries was a perfect example of what these conservative and right-wing Catholic publications were concerned about. Formally, the Council did not contravene pre-existing Catholic practices regarding Mary or devotion to her, but what the Council did decide could easily be interpreted as such, and ultimately was. In the minds of the conservative authors of *Roma* and the other publications considered here, this was nothing more than a smokescreen for a more insidious goal, namely to change the Church from the inside out in a way that would render it unrecognizable, not just to theologians who could closely read Conciliar documents in Latin, but to everyday Catholics who prayed the Rosary and who kept Marian shrines and Marian devotions throughout Latin America.

The Chilean journal *FIDUCIA*, which began as an independent publication of conservative Catholic political criticism but later joined the international network of the Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP), offers a good window into this issue. In November of 1964, shortly before the release of *Lumen Gentium* as the new foundational framework for approaching the Marian question, *FIDUCIA* ran a short, plaintive paragraph contemplating modern Marian apparitions, and specifically, why so many appear to be “crying.”³³ Against the “optimism and superficiality of the modern [contemporary] man,” Mary appears “weeping, maternally admonishing us.” Mary was not only present, and present in a

28. The Rosary was, and still is, an important part of much Marian devotion. See Nathan Mitchell, *The Mystery of the Rosary: Marian Devotion and the Reinvention of Catholicism* (New York: University Press, 2009); Michael P. Carroll, *Catholic Cults and Devotions: A Psychological Inquiry* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7zxbm>.

29. García Vieyra, “La meditación de María,” 11.

30. García Vieyra, “La meditación de María,” 12.

31. García Vieyra, “La meditación de María,” 15.

32. García Vieyra, “La meditación de María,” 17.

33. Patricio Larraín Bustamante, “Nuestra Señora lloró sobre el mundo contemporáneo,” *FIDUCIA* no. 13 (1964), 3.

way that the modern world often forgot, she was also aware of humanity's failure to live up to her example and that of her son, particularly in what the magazine's editors considered to be modern, "superficial" times.

In the following number of *FIDUCIA*, from December 1964 to January 1965, a story on Mary occupied the center of the paper. "[F]rom the first moment of the Incarnation in her virginal womb," Mary's role as the mother of the Church, and thereby of all the faithful, was assured.³⁴ She was beseeched to preside over the Council itself, to "protect" and "assist" its participants in their "arduous task." They needed her help so that they might recall why they were in the Council at all – to promote and protect Catholicism from "tribulation." Special mention was given to protecting the voices and souls of those Christians who "suffer persecution" or "find themselves imprisoned for their faith." Only closeness with Mary could provide these people with their "just liberty."

Invoking Mary in this way and for this cause was a signal that *FIDUCIA*, like the other journals analyzed here, was going beyond standard Catholic practice, which mentioned Mary in a time of need or used Marian devotion to ensure the continued popularity of the Church. Mary was a symbol of specific traditional values and practices held up as an exemplar of hope for Catholics who lived in conditions in which they might "suffer" for their faith. These conditions are left unnamed in the journal article, but this was an implicit reference to Catholics living behind the Iron Curtain, or living in countries where Catholic values, once held dear, were being challenged or undermined by outside influence.

These conflicts over the veneration of Mary were clear examples of theological arguments with massive, real-world implications, not just for the members of the hierarchy but for the laity as well. The pages written and ink spilled over her veneration were clear indications that many of the same publications that despaired of other changes in the Church saw the Marian issue as vital to the future of Catholicism. Theological questions like these shared the same page as lengthy diatribes about decolonization, international finance, and domestic political contests. Beyond the earnest concern over her role in the Church, calls to protect Marian devotion were a kind of dog-whistle for other social and political commitments, namely those that concerned the role of women in society. The same publications that were so deeply concerned with Marian devotion displayed deep anxiety over twentieth-century developments in gender equality and women's rights.

Birth, Divorce, and the Family

Birth and population growth was a central way that conservative and right-wing Catholic authors in Latin America united social questions with discussions of Mary as a role model and intermediary between the human and the divine. The *Anales de la Facultad de Teología* de Chile, in its 1965–1966 issue, included a one-hundred page treatise on birth control by Juan de Castro Reyes acknowledging that birth control was a complex issue that touched, not just on questions of the family and gender, but also on national development and international power relations.³⁵ And yet, despite this complexity, Christian communities could not "remain silent" in the face of the problems posed by the very concept of birth control. As Father C. Mertens, S.J. – a sociology professor and expert on the Church's doctrine on "fecundity" – is quoted as saying, "an immense effort of explanation and diffusion is required, in which all, priests and laity, must

34. Uncredited, "María, madre de la Iglesia," *FIDUCIA*, reprinted from the Spanish journal *Ecclesia* no. 14 (1964–1965), 6.

35. Juan de Castro Reyes, *La Regulación de los nacimientos: Reflexiones teologicomorales para una acción pastoral* (Anales de la Facultad de Teología Nos. 17–18 [1965–1966], Cuaderno 1; Santiago: Universidad Católica de Chile, 1966).

take their part, following an urgent necessity.”³⁶ Science and “modern times” had produced a concrete problem with major theological implications and connections.

Beginning with a section on “The Dynamism of Conjugal Chastity” and moving to another on “Conjugal Onanism in the Sacrament of Penitence,” the lengthy article addresses theological questions raised by the recent commercial viability of the birth control pill.³⁷ The central theological question was this: if couples had been practicing forms of natural birth control for centuries or millennia with Church approval and even endorsement, what difference did it make that these scientifically verified methods of reducing the likelihood of pregnancy were now joined with an artificial contraceptive pill? In answering this question the author reminded his readers that even these common “techniques,” such as the “Ogino method”³⁸ (generally known in English as the “rhythm method”), “cannot guarantee an authentically moral Christian life.”³⁹ Thus even when carried out between two loving, married Catholics, any method whose intention was to reduce the likelihood of childbirth was not only dubious but potentially against Catholic doctrine. Indeed, the very “condition of matrimonial love” was “fecundity.”⁴⁰ This was the case even when the married couple practiced “chastity” in the interest of not having more children, which was the only method of birth control that the author of the piece holds as theologically viable.⁴¹

“Contraception” went against all these virtues, “attacking the specific end of matrimony which is fecundity” and the “conjugal unity and the values of loving reciprocity.”⁴² Even worse, contraception represented a “lie” on the part of any woman who used it, as she both negates the purpose of sexuality and matrimony and seeks to “brusquely renounce her gift” of being able to bear children. This was a gift she does not deny her counterpart, but something she “takes from herself.”⁴³ Contraceptives “center [on] pleasure” rather than procreation, and represented a “submission to the genital,” resulting in “massive social repercussions.” While the author did not believe that chastity could be something regulated by law – “if chastity cannot be achieved through a technique, neither can it be an attitude [...] as a product of accommodating oneself to a law because it is a law” – he did believe that it could be taught by Catholic education.⁴⁴ This was one of his central suggestions for Catholic countries and political actors, the promotion of Catholic education about the purpose of marriage and birth.

Because of this, these priests would pay close attention to these gendered issues involving marriage, childbirth, and gender roles. Birth and birth control were of particular concern because they lay at the confluence of the personal and the societal – birth control was not just about particular couples, but about “modern western civilization” in general.⁴⁵ Thus despite socioeconomic and personal issues, it was the obligation of Catholics to “combat techniques of conception” as much as “unnatural methods” of contraception, not only for the moral good of the families concerned but for the good of Christian society. These matters were at once personal and deeply political. Birth control, birth rates, and other family matters

36. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 6.

37. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 12. Onanism is a synonym for masturbation.

38. So named after Dr. Kyusaku Ogino, a Japanese obstetrician and gynecologist who was one of the first doctors to measure the length of menstrual cycles to calculate fertility.

39. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 17.

40. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 31.

41. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 38.

42. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 45.

43. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 46.

44. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 47.

45. de Castro Reyes, “La Regulación de los nacimientos,” 77.

were thus perfect examples of how gender lay at the intersection of modern social life and medieval or even late antiquity Catholic teaching.

The representation of proper married life was one of the most significant roles that Mary and devotion to her performed. This was particularly important in Argentina and Chile in the mid-twentieth century, because at the time disputes over the legality of divorce were taking place in these countries – divorce was briefly legalized in Argentina in 1954 and then made illegal again in 1956 with the coup that ended the first Peronist government.⁴⁶ Through the middle of the twentieth century, neither Argentina nor Chile would legalize divorce, and Chile remained without a divorce law until the twenty-first century.⁴⁷ Following their loss of control over educational systems in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conservative Catholics saw this conflict over divorce as a key issue, a bellwether of their control over a given society and the government that presided over it (with notable reversals in the form of right-wing governments as in Argentina and Spain, which returned education to the Church as part of their social programs).⁴⁸

Divorce was thus a constant concern on the political and theological Catholic right. *Teología y Vida*, took pains to specify that, despite all the changes and challenges to Christian doctrine in the intervening millennia, Jesus's prohibition against divorce stood firm.⁴⁹ The article emphasized that the potential legitimate reasons for divorce, namely adultery or other injuries committed against women, were intended to protect women from predatory or abandoning men. In the opinion of the article's author, himself a theologian, the biblical verses usually cited to potentially justify divorce were in contradiction with other parts of the passage. He reminded his readers that arguing that the Bible contradicts itself was against Catholic doctrine, and that this principle therefore invalidated any interpretation which could be construed as accepting divorce. Instead, he engaged in a thorough theological exegesis to reach the same conclusion the Church had already reached – that divorce could not be permitted. Rather than falling into such "contradictions," unity was maintained, and "matrimony" was preserved as "Christian perfection."⁵⁰

Beginning their 1964 article on divorce with lengthy quotes from the Council of Trent, which affirmed the "perpetual and indissoluble ties of marriage," *La Revista Católica de Santiago* thus firmly established their position that the question of divorce had already been answered in the sixteenth century and needed no revisiting. "[T]he greatest philosophers, canonists, moralists, and modern theologians, unanimously and without exception, hold up the same doctrine," that the permanence of marriage was in accord with natural law, and therefore with Catholic practice and doctrine.⁵¹ *Teología y Vida* concurred, arguing that "Matrimony (as with Virginity) is in the service of the nuptial love of Christ's Grace" and that ultimately every Christian was "'married'" to God.⁵²

46. Donald A. Wiesner, "Enactment and Suspension of Absolute Divorce in Argentina," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 9, no. 1 (1960): 94–104.

47. Claudia Rojas Mira, "Contradicciones de la modernidad: El no divorcio en Chile," *Debate Feminista* 16 (1997): 341–356.

48. Javier Martínez-Torron, "School and Religion in Spain," *Journal of Church and State* 47, no. 1 (2005): 133–150; Virginia W. Leonard, "Education and the Church-State Clash in Argentina, 1954–1955," *The Catholic Historical Review* 66, no. 1 (1980): 34–52.

49. Antonio Moreno, "¿Jesús admite divorcio?" *Teología y Vida* (1960): 101–106.

50. Moreno, "¿Jesús admite divorcio?" 106.

51. Moreno, "¿Jesús admite divorcio?" 106.

52. Moreno, "¿Jesús admite divorcio?" 106.

Considered in isolation, this emphasis on, and need to protect, traditional gender and family roles might seem uninteresting and innocuous. However, in the context of a changing Church and transforming world, the fact that these sources considered it not only relevant but necessary to emphasize the sanctity and permanence of marriage indicates their worry that changes in the Church's understanding of the divine family could lead to changes in its understanding of human families as well. This is one way in which discussions of Mary's motherhood and marriage – of Christ and to the Church – dovetail with discussions of everyday, human motherhood and marriage.

Other journals went further in using the question of divorce to unite these threads of theological and political gender traditionalism. *FIDUCIA* noted in its September 1965 issue that Chile was considering the legalization of divorce, something which “Catholics cannot accept” due to the “teachings of the Church fathers.”⁵³ They understood divorce as a literal assault by the modern world on the nation, tradition, and family, which were the “foundation” of Christendom. Having characterized their defence of Marian devotion in the same language, which paralleled discussions of divorce in its connecting theological arguments about permanence and immanence with practical, contemporary questions, *FIDUCIA* emphasized the connections between these theological problems and the changing, modern world. In another *FIDUCIA* article from later in 1965, when the Chilean parliament was deliberating divorce law, the editorial board (and authors of the article) reminded their readers that “Catholics know that we cannot accept divorce,” and further that “the teachings of the Popes” show that “divorce is a corruption, an offence equally to the natural as well as the supernatural, Godly order.”⁵⁴

Roma, a politically and religiously charged journal in Argentina, was more direct when its own Congress was considering a divorce law in 1968 after the promulgation of the changes brought by Vatican II. They expressed their “hope that the President of the Nation [Argentina] stay vigilant, and, with the help of Our Lady [Mary], have the necessary fortitude to fight against such trends.”⁵⁵ Mary was specifically invoked to provide strength to political actors who were tasked with defending the traditional family and traditional gender roles. As noted in another conservative Argentine journal, *Verbo*, this was especially vital given the assault on the family from “neopaganism,” which the Council failed to adequately address and confront.⁵⁶

Concern over divorce, its legalization, and what this might represent for the future of Catholic traditionalism remained in the spotlight for many conservative and right-wing Catholic publications throughout the 1970s. The December 1975 issue of the Argentine journal *TFP Informa*, the flagship newsletter of Argentina's branch of the Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property, included a letter from a Brazilian bishop, Antonio de Castro Mayer, regarding the country's proposed new divorce laws. Bishop Mayer was of course incensed by this possibility, which he considered to be a tool of the “enemies of the family, which is founded on monogamous and indissoluble marriage.”⁵⁷ He argued that these enemies sought to “implant this scourge of decadent nations,” divorce, “in our country as well.”⁵⁸

He exhorted his fellow Catholics in light of the “recent Council” to protect “the orthodox Faith.”⁵⁹ Faithful Catholics had the “obligation” to protect the “sacred character” of marriage from outside

53. Javier Polanco Silva, “El Divorcio y las Tendencias Románticas,” *FIDUCIA* no. 19 (1965): 4–5.

54. Polanco Silva, “El Divorcio,” 5.

55. Editors, “Divorcio,” *Roma* no. 3 (1968): 1–3.

56. José M. Escobar, “Familia y concilio,” *Verbo*, no. 52 (1965): 14–17.

57. Dom Antonio de Castro Mayer, “El divorcio,” *TFP Informa* no. 27 (1975): 18–25.

58. de Castro Mayer, “El divorcio,” 18.

59. de Castro Mayer, “El divorcio,” 19.

influences. This is because, within a Catholic society, marriage functioned as a producer and defender of the family; as the vehicle of the promotion of “religion” within a community. The bishop reminded his readers that the divine function and nature of marriage was confirmed by Pope Pius XI in the Encyclical “*Casti Connubii*,” in which he wrote that “matrimony was not instituted or restored by man but by God.”⁶⁰ Marriage was a perfect example of a human, social, and legal institution which a secular society might mistake as belonging to the world of man but which in fact fell under the purview of the Church. It was not merely a human agreement but a “supernatural” one, something which Catholics had recognized for “centuries” and could not justifiably retreat from now that their power in the secular world was waning.

Contemporary campaigns against the legalization of divorce in Spain drew similar attention from Catholic organizations. The Spanish magazine of the *TFP*, *Covadonga*, printed a letter signed by over 1,000 Spanish priests opposing the law on July 10, 1978:

Directors, members, and beloved members and collaborators of the society of Covadonga, accompanied by a group of Priests from the Archdiocese of Madrid, made their entrance in Spanish court [...] with a petition signed by more than 1,000 priests from all regions of Spain, in which they requested that the clause which permits the introduction of divorce in our legislation be eliminated from the future Constitution.⁶¹

These universal concerns related to the structure and function of family were part of global Catholic debates, not only in Latin America, but in Spain and elsewhere as well. Gender power structures that the Church carefully regulated were challenged by battles over the legalization of divorce and abortion, two things which the Latin American right could not condone as aspects of the modern world.

These issues – birth, divorce, and the family – are perfect examples of the intersection between theology and politics. Not only in the sense that political actors looked to the teachings of the Church, but also in the sense that theologians and priests directly intervened in political affairs through advocacy and activism during a period of change in gender roles in Latin America and around the world. That right-wing and conservative Catholics would oppose abortion rights and seek to prevent the legalization of divorce should surprise no one. What is important and interesting in these polemics against social change is how these commentators connected issues as disparate as the question of Mary’s relationship to the divine with these more practical, everyday questions of how everyday people should live and engage with one another. Debates over Marian devotion connected these issues in the minds of the authors of these publications, which ranged from university departments to political organizations.

But the theological question of Marianism was also more basic than its relation to the place of women in society, or to the ways in which women were venerated in predominantly Catholic cultures. It was also a question about the position of women *in the Church itself*, and thus the relation of women to the hierarchy of male priests. This question had two related aspects, one regarding the relation between lay women and the hierarchy, and the other between nuns and the hierarchy. With the liturgical and doctrinal changes brought by the Second Vatican Council, women were enabled to participate in liturgy for the first time in the modern era.⁶² For the first time in millennia, since the formalization of what could really be understood as the Catholic liturgy, women were able to physically participate in the dissemination of communion materials. They could handle sacred objects on the altar and could even read homilies and other

60. de Castro Mayer, “El divorcio,” 19.

61. Editors, “Eurocomunismo y catolicismo progresista,” *Covadonga Informa* no. 10 (1978), 1.

62. Carmel Pilcher, David Orr and Elizabeth Harrington, eds., *Vatican Council II: Reforming Liturgy* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2013).

Biblical messages from the very pulpits used by the priests. This democratization of Christian practices and holy rites was literally inconceivable in a Catholic context before the Council. And while it's arguable that one consequence of this shift was that women were more receptive to the changes brought about by the Council, another was that the very nature of what it meant to be Catholic was seen as being seriously threatened.

The March 1965 edition of *Verbo*, coinciding with the release of the text of *Lumen Gentium*, published a lengthy article on Mary and her role in distinguishing Catholicism from other Christianities, namely Protestantism. The mid-1960s, the article stated, was a "critical moment in the history of Christianity."⁶³ The piece referenced one of the original intentions of the Second Vatican Council, to move toward Christian unity – to progress in the direction of mending the Great Schism between Rome and what came to be known as the Orthodox Churches, as well as the divide between Protestants and Catholics. The article notes that while this unity was a noble cause, it could not be achieved at the expense of what makes Catholics Catholic – in this case, Marian devotion – by building it on a "doctrinarian Babel." The author exhorted Church leaders not to abandon the hallmarks of Marian devotion, such as the "Rosary, the Scapulary,⁶⁴ and the Crown" which were all too often denigrated as belonging only to "little women and fools."⁶⁵ Here again, is a conservative Catholic commentator arguing for the maintenance of tradition in the face of modernizing reform.

The error with which *Verbo* was concerned in this piece was the relegation of Marian devotion to the background of Catholic practice. Marianism was understood by conservative Catholics to define Catholicism against other Christianities (seen as heresies), and this distinction was not made solely in terms of intellectual debates. As much as Marianism provided an answer to a question about the relationship between the divine and the human, it also addressed contemporary questions about family and gender, leading theological debates, and play-by-plays of Conciliar proceedings from the pages of magazines and journals into legislative chambers, government offices, and private homes.

Another *Verbo* article from July 1965 continues in the same vein, terrified of the "revolution in conjugal morals" brought about by the Council and its treatment of Mary, which it argued would result in the "the systematic and scientific destruction of the family."⁶⁶ Holding up Marian veneration, and Mary as an example of a traditional woman, was central to this strategy. The author of this article, and others in *Verbo*, exhorted his readers to "pray for the Council to formulate a declaration which will create in us a spirit and movement of familial restoration."⁶⁷ Specifically calling out the Council for failing to make such a "declaration" in the context of the Conciliar documents – which did touch on the family and the role of women – speaks volumes without raising questions of heterodoxy or openly questioning the decisions of the Council. The speaker is worried and deeply disappointed that the Council's attention to these issues is not only lacking, but is evidence of moral and theological backsliding.

Concern over the defence of the traditional nature of Marian devotion even made its way into the files of the secret police in Argentina. During their surveillance of the *Sacerdotes del Tercer Mundo* (The Movement of Priests for the Third World), the Argentine secret police paid special attention to pamphlets and other material concerned with the family and with Mary. In one such leaflet, titled "Mary's Shawl Has

63. San Luis María Grignon de Montfort, "Devoción a María," *Verbo* no. 48 (1965): 19.

64. The scapulary, or Scapular, is a form of Catholic devotion consisting of wearing divine quotes or images under one's clothes as a reminder of faith – these often either reference Mary, or are a motif in Marian art.

65. Grignon de Montfort, "Devoción a María," 19.

66. Escobar, "Familia y Concilio," 14.

67. Escobar, "Familia y Concilio," 16.

Been Dirtied,” the leftist priests use Mary in a call for socialism. The fact that this was possible – that Marian devotion had become so sullied that it could be twisted to the use of the conservative theologians’ greatest enemy – revealed more than anything else that the place of Mary in the Church was changing, and in conservative opinion was changing for the worse.⁶⁸

The maintenance of traditional gender norms was something that could unite disparate members of the right-wing in a defense of tradition. This was the core of the issue surrounding Mary’s relation to power, which is why this issue came to a head during the Second Vatican Council and ended up serving as a proxy for many other conflicts. Venerating Mary as a saint, perhaps even the highest and most important saint, and believing that she was born without sin, in addition to the myriad of other ways in which Mary was separated from regular humans made her something of a divine figure in her own right – one more relatable, more human, more accessible, more understandable, and more feminine than God or Christ specifically.

Defending what conservative and right-wing commentators understood as traditional Marian devotion wasn’t an academic exercise. In their minds, threats to Marianism were like cracks in the edifice of Catholicism itself, threatening the entirety of the Church and what distinguished it from other forms of Christianity. But more than that, these challenges portended greater threats to Catholicism, namely the possibility that in the face of the political left, the Church would stop being Catholic but cease to be Christian altogether. Here Marian devotion served to protect not only Catholicism but western civilization.

A Marian Conference Against Communism

In 1960, to commemorate the sesquicentennial anniversary of Argentina’s independence from Spain and also Latin America’s independence and identity as a region, the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires convened the First Interamerican Marian Conference. In February of that year invitations were sent to the leaders of the episcopates in many Latin American countries, including Chile, where *Revista Católica*, the periodical of the Archdiocese of Santiago, published the invitation in full. In this same publication, Cardinal Caggiano, the highest-ranking priest in Argentina, urged his fellow Catholic leaders to begin an annual tradition of hosting a conference to venerate the Virgin, suggesting that this might merely be the “first” of a “series that will periodically continue, repeating throughout all of America.”⁶⁹ Caggiano wrote that he had received authorization from the Holy See⁷⁰ “to make this proposal to the Venerable Episcopates of each and every American country, requesting that they attend.”⁷¹

Pairing the veneration of Mary with the celebration of national independence was not unusual, but it was telling of the cardinal’s motivations for calling the conference. He was not interested in the veneration of Mary just for her own sake, or even for the sake of the Church and its congregants. Instead, his goal was:

[T]o put us under Mary’s maternal protection in the organized, thought-out, and no-quarter-given fight against heresy and heretics who seek the destruction of the Kingdom of God, beginning our fight, in the Continent, with an act of faith in Mary, saying “Thou alone in the entire world has crushed all the heresies.”⁷²

68. Newspaper Clipping “El Manto de la Virgen ha Sido Manchado,” *El Sol* (1970), Referencia Legajo N15281, Tomo I, Archivo del DIPBA, 212.

69. Cardinal Antonio Caggiano, “Invitación del Episcopado Argentino a un Congreso Mariano Interamericano con Ocasión del Sesquicentenario de la Independencia,” *Revista Católica* no. 986 (1960): 2575–2576.

70. The Holy See is the government of the Roman Catholic Church, which is led by the pope.

71. Caggiano, “Invitación del Episcopado Argentino,” 2576.

72. Caggiano, “Invitación del Episcopado Argentino,” 2576. The quoted section beginning “thou alone” is in Latin in the original, taken from the Immaculata prayer.

As this excerpt highlights, Caggiano did not convene this conference to venerate Mary out of religious devotion, nor did he convene it out of academic interest regarding the possible changes to Marian devotion that the Second Vatican Council might bring – rather, it was convened in response to the “danger” faced by “all peoples of the Continent.” The cardinal summed up this danger in a single word: “communism.” Together with its allies, “atheism” and “materialism,” communism threatened the “Christian civilization” of the Americas. In response, the cardinal argued that the Catholic peoples of the Americas needed to rely on the “Immaculate and eternal Virgin Mary.”⁷³

On March 26th, the Archbishop of Concepcion, Alfredo Silva Santiago – who was Cardinal Caggiano’s Chilean counterpart as the President of the Episcopal Conference of his country – responded to the invitation, an answer also published in the *Revista Católica*. Archbishop Santiago expressed his “gratitude” for the invitation and promised his country’s “cordial assent and most enthusiastic collaboration” with the initiative.⁷⁴ He echoed his Argentine brother’s rationale for convening the conference, stating that devotion to Mary would surely prove an “effective weapon to fight against that heresy of heresies, atheist communism.”⁷⁵

It is not particularly unusual that two Latin American archbishops in the middle of the twentieth century would agree on the importance of venerating Mary, or on the idea that communism was the main adversary of their communities and their countries. Yet, in the context of the preparations for the Second Vatican Council, which many hoped would produce documents that would fundamentally change the way Mary was venerated by Catholics the world over, this conference took on a greater significance. Here, the leaders of two important Catholic countries were discussing the veneration of Mary, not with the intention to draw Catholics into the Church or to popularize the faith, but instead as a religious and political tool to defend against a foreign adversary that they and other Latin Americans were increasingly afraid of in light of the recent success of the Cuban Revolution in toppling Batista. The Conference provided historians with a useful window into the formation of this consensus because it was literally the result of priests from the region coming together to proclaim their continued devotion to Mary, who could bring about regional unification as a symbol of each nation through her various apparitions and as a symbol of Catholic unity through her divine motherhood.

A few months before the conference, the 1960 September edition of the *Boletín Eclesiástico*, a publication of the Archbishopric of Buenos Aires, devoted its cover to the conference.⁷⁶ It noted that the purpose of the conference was a simple one: “to plan works before the grave danger of communism and adopt opportune resolutions in the light of Marian doctrine.”⁷⁷ As was customary in these situations, Mary herself and the precise content of devotion to her was eclipsed by the dangers of communism and the need to defend the country and continent from its forces. Clearly, the purpose of the conference was to persuade its participants and observers that “communism constitutes the greatest and the worst of the heresies that have emerged throughout the centuries up to the present,” rather than to examine devotion to Mary or theology specifically relevant to Marian devotion.⁷⁸ This was particularly vital in Latin America, because the continent had “sixty-four Catholic Universities and [an even] greater number of middle and high

73. Caggiano, “Invitación del Episcopado Argentino,” 2576.

74. Alfredo Silva Santiago, “Respuesta del Episcopado Chileno a la invitación del Episcopado Argentino al Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” *Revista Católica de Buenos Aires*, no. 986 (1960): 2576.

75. Santiago, “Respuesta del Episcopado Chileno,” 2576.

76. Editors, “Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” *Boletín Eclesiástico del Arzobispado de Buenos Aires*, no. 33 (1960): 117.

77. Editors, “Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” 117.

78. Editors, “Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” 117.

schools,” where “future leaders” learn, not only their faith, but also their national obligations. The author of the essay wrote that Marian devotion was “so rooted in our peoples,” that it could be the force that “will closely unite us in a true crusade against communism and will assure us of a definitive victory.”⁷⁹ Here, Marian devotion is thus understood as the element that will “immunize” people against the “modern heresy, communism.”

The conference took place in 1960 between November 10th and 13th, a month designated as “Mary Month” by the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires.⁸⁰ The event, which was presided over by the “Virgin of Luján, sworn patron of Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay,” took place in the city’s cathedral on the Plaza de Mayo, just around the corner from the Casa Rosada, Argentina’s Presidential house, and was covered in the December issue of the *Boletín Eclesiástico*. The conference began with a parade so exciting that drivers stopped their cars and “workers of various businesses left their labours and joined in the general enthusiasm”⁸¹ – a sure sign of Marian devotion’s capacity to produce the kind of unity that the conference aimed to achieve.

It is noteworthy that most media coverage of the conference made no mention of the anti-communist aims proclaimed by its organizers or participants, and to the parishioners, the conference appeared as a celebration honouring the Virgin Mary that mixed “floral arrangements,” “Boy-Scouts,” and “horsemen in gaucho costumes.” For the conference organizers, Mary was a useful means to unite the people behind conservative interests to prevent their country from sliding towards communism, whereas for the lay observers who were the intended audience of this message, it was a spectacle that one might take a child to see. Following the conference’s conclusion, other celebrations were held, including the erection of “[a] monumental cross that presided over the meetings of the Congress,” which was donated to the government of Argentina to be placed in the Río de la Plata close to the dockyards of Buenos Aires.⁸²



Cross and Monument of the First Inter-American Marian Congress, Av. Libertador and Av. Sarmiento.⁸³

79. Editors, “Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” 117.

80. Editors, “Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” 117.

81. Editors, “Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” 117.

82. Editors, “La cruz monumental del 1er. Congreso mariano internacional,” *Boletín Eclesiástico del Arzobispado de Buenos Aires* no. 44 (1961): 1.

83. Claudio Williams, “Monumento del Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” *Archivo Amancio Williams*, published in 2017, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://www.amanciowilliams.com/archivo/monumento-del-primer-congreso-mariano-interamericano>.

At the conference, Pope John XXIII delivered an address that was read aloud to the crowd and broadcast on the radio. In this address he conveyed the message of continental unity through Mary: “The Virgin of Luján [Argentina], of Guadalupe [Mexico], of Copacabana [Bolivia], of each and every Sanctuary that adorns the varied geography of your continent” came together to “irradiate life and [bring] supernatural breath” into the lives and works of Catholics in Latin America.⁸⁴ While less openly anti-communist than the messages shared by the Argentine and Chilean Archbishops who convened and attended the conference, the Pope’s message was nevertheless one that emphasized the necessity for Christian unity in the face of common foes and the need to “defend the Christian faith.”

When it was announced and while it was taking place, this Marian conference was the primary topic of the journals of the largest and most influential dioceses in both Argentina and Chile, clearly reflecting its significance. The conference brought clergy from across the continent together and, on the anniversary of their independence, led congregants back to the Church, particularly back to the traditional, national symbols of their respective countries. Marian devotion allowed the clergy to strengthen the bonds between their congregants’ nationalities and Catholicism to protect them against a continental enemy – communism – that threatened to undermine the power of both the nation and the Church. Mary’s veneration served as the perfect platform for organizing inter-American Catholic solidarity against non-Catholics because she was both a universally revered saint and the patroness of several nations through a series of apparitions.

Criterio, Argentina’s most important journal of theology and politics, devoted its cover story to the conference in its issue on November 10, 1960. Written by the editors of the journal and titled “Against Communism (The theme of the Interamerican Marian Congress),” the article began with a quote from theorist Jean-Ives Gálvez on Marx and Marxism, noting that as “800 million people live today under governments which apply the Marxist doctrine” the danger posed by Marxism was more than one of political difference.⁸⁵ Rather, the danger of Marxism was that it “divides families, societies, nations, and empires. It separates friends.”⁸⁶ Marxism was thus a challenge to the entirety of society because of its effect on people’s lived experiences. The editors asked its readers to imagine what these changes would mean “for the future of Argentina” and “the future of Latin America and the western world.”⁸⁷

And yet, because “Marxism is a theory of action,” it could not be fought simply with words. The situation was even more serious given the “effectiveness” of communism in organizing new adherents, particularly among the downtrodden.⁸⁸ Attention to this danger was necessary in order to “preserve western civilization.”⁸⁹ The internal guiding documents of the Marian Congress, which were reprinted in *Criterio*, confirmed this all-encompassing focus – their goal was to preserve “religious, cultural, and socio-economic order,” as “Marxism is the antithesis of the Christian concept of God, man, and the community.”⁹⁰ At the Congress, attendees debated the influence of Marxism on subjects as diverse as “indigenous nationalism,”

84. Pope John XXIII, “Radiomensaje de su Santidad Juan XXIII al Final del Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano Celebrado en Buenos Aires,” *Criterio* 52 (1960) 980–982; Giovanni XXIII, *Discorsi, messaggi, colloqui di Giovanni XXIII. Vol. 3: 28 ottobre 1960–27 ottobre 1961* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1962), 11–14.

85. Editorial Board, “Frente al comunismo (El tema del Congreso Mariano Interamericano),” *Criterio* no. 1367 (1960): 803–806.

86. Editorial Board, “Frente al comunismo,” 803.

87. Editorial Board, “Frente al comunismo,” 804.

88. Editorial Board, “Frente al comunismo,” 804.

89. Editorial Board, “Frente al comunismo,” 806.

90. Congreso Mariano Interamericano, “Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” *Criterio*, no. 1367 (1960): 820.

“architecture,” and “music,” but their attention was particularly drawn to the effect that Marxism would have on the family and its place in the socio-economic order.

The concluding documents from the Congress were published in the following two issues of *Criterio*, which appeared in December 1960 and January 1961. The December issue printed the conclusions of the conference, which focused on “God, Man, and Community.”⁹¹ These documents argued that “from its intrinsically materialistic and theistic conception of man and history, Marxism refutes the spirituality and immortality of the human soul.”⁹² Whereas communists held that man was trapped in the material world, Catholics argued that mankind was fundamentally “free.” Marxists, who saw people as being in a state of enslavement, thus sought to liberate them from “family, State, Religion [...] [and] private property,” among a host of other things that conservative Catholics reading and writing in *Criterio* would consider important enough to fight for. This was particularly true in situations where the personal and the social intersected, like in education: “Christianity, against [communism’s] totalitarian thesis, defends the natural right of the family over education [...] and the divine right of the Church to orient it in conformity with the supernatural end to which man is destined.”⁹³ Education was for the “common good.”

Emphasizing Marian veneration combined the personal and political as a means of opposing communism, a threat to both spheres of life. Her experience as a mediator, mother, and link between the human and the divine reflected the connection to everyday social and familial matters, which *Criterio* and other publications accused communism of undermining. In place of the natural familial order, communism offered a family “produced by the citizen [...]. It recognizes neither relation nor obligation between parents and children or within married couples. The consequence is that there aren’t connections, unity, faithfulness, or indissolubility in marriage.”⁹⁴ Conversely, in Christianity, marriage “is the natural [state] of society [...] and is a sacrament.”⁹⁵ Marriage was the foundation of all human society and therefore something that needed defending.

The following issue of *Criterio* continued the release of these documents. In addition to more of the same analysis on the dangers of communism, these documents primarily stressed the need to maintain Catholic or Christian dominance in the areas of society and culture which directly impacted the structure of the home and the raising of children. However, this document also addressed some of the more fundamental problems facing the Church in Latin America – namely, the difficulty defending what the Church had left given the cultural and political territory the secular world had already gained. To correct this, Catholics were told they must “intervene” in their respective countries to “elevate the quality of life of the inhabitants of Iberoamerica.”⁹⁶ The final documents of the conference focused on the need to maintain the order of private property while not allowing people to fall into such need and deprivation that they would be enamoured with communism. Giving “dignity and wellbeing” to the poor was an instrumental means of ensuring that they remained loyal Catholics and did not turn to Marxism.

The documents which concluded the Marian Conference were a perfect example of how Marian language and devotion can be used to address other social or political questions. Mary and references to her allowed the attending priests and theologians to further the Catholic Church’s cause and to defend the

91. Congreso Mariano Interamericano, “Conclusiones de las jornadas de estudios del Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano,” *Criterio* no. 1369–1370 (1960): 952–953.

92. Congreso, “Conclusiones de las jornadas,” 952.

93. Congreso, “Conclusiones de las jornadas,” 953.

94. Congreso, “Conclusiones de las jornadas,” 953.

95. Congreso, “Conclusiones de las jornadas,” 953.

96. Congreso Mariano Interamericano, “Conclusiones de las jornadas de estudios del Primer Congreso Mariano Interamericano, Continuación,” *Criterio* no. 1371 (1961): 21–23.

Church against the secular left. The conference's focus shifted from Mary and Marian devotion itself to the things which Mary represented – the integration of the Catholic faith into the everyday fabric of society.

This international Marian conference united politicized Catholic priests and observers from across the continent in defence of both Mary and their respective countries. Mary served as both a symbol of the traditionalist Catholic world and as the namesake of an explicitly anti-communist event. In other words, by representing both the theory and the practice of this traditionalist Catholicism, Mary became the embodiment of anticommunism in Catholicism. Latin American Catholics believed that Mar's influence as a symbol of tradition and a figure of unification in the fight against communism and all forms of modernity was universal, and they did not limit Mary's role in that way to their region. No aspect of Mary demonstrates that better than Fatima.

Fatima

One of the most important and often cited Marian apparitions in conservative Latin American Catholic circles was Our Lady of Fatima.⁹⁷ This Marian apparition was particularly important for several reasons, including the fact that it occurred in the hinterlands of Iberia, which was one of the central locations of the kind of mythical Old World that the right's nostalgia centred around. She appeared to children, specifically a set of cousins, emphasizing the importance of the family. And, finally, she appeared at a particularly opportune time in world history to tie Mary to the fight against communism. The only one of those three children to live to adulthood, Lúcia de Jesus Rosa dos Santos,⁹⁸ claimed that this Marian apparition, sighted in 1917, made several prophecies, some of which have been interpreted as accurate particularly those relating to geopolitical conflicts, such as the Second World War. The prophecies from the Virgin of Fatima included specific references to Catholic concerns about Russia, serving as an important connection to the history of the interactions between the Catholic Church and the rise of communism.

Politicized Marian devotion in the form of Fatima veneration was a regular feature of many conservative Catholic Latin American publications. For instance, *Roma* – a conservative Catholic publication which tasked itself with the defence of “tradition” and had an editorial board made up of both clergy and laymen – regularly incorporated references to Mary and Fatima. The first volume of the journal, released in September 1967, opened proclaiming as its primary objectives “1) To spread the traditional doctrine of the Church [and] 2) To promote the veneration of the most Holy Virgin,” among other objectives such as uplifting hierarchy's power and maintaining the Church's right, or obligation, to intervene in temporal affairs. These secular concerns were the cause of anticommunism and the defence of traditional values.⁹⁹

The journal's regular references to Fatima – as opposed to Argentina's particular Marian patron, Our Lady of Luján – belie its primary concern with issues that mixed the secular and religious. An insert from the journal's fifth volume, published in July 1968, made reference to the “message of Fatima” as reported by those three Portuguese cousins decades earlier. *Roma* reminded its readers that the Fatima apparition warned that God would “castigate the world” for its crimes and that this castigation would take the form of “war, hunger, and persecutions against the Church and the Holy Father” – all of which, in the

97. Una M. Cadegan, “The Queen of Peace in the Shadow of War: Fatima and U.S. Catholic Anticommunism,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 4 (2004): 1–15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25154930>.

98. She later became a nun with the Discalced Carmelites.

99. SS Pio XII, “María Reina,” *Roma* no. 1 (1967): 14.

minds of conservative Catholic readers and writers, did transpire in the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁰ The authors were also careful to remind their readers of the centrality of Russia to Fatima's message. Fatima promised that "her Immaculate Heart will triumph" and that "the Holy Father will consecrate Russia and it will be converted" to the Catholic faith, thus earning itself and the world an "age of peace." Here Russia meant both the Soviet Union, the state itself, and the danger of communism which it represented. The journal's ninth volume featured a long story on Fatima by Pierre Lemaire. Placed between a story on the "Cultural Revolution" and another on the dangers of progressive Christianity, the article argues for the continued relevance of Fatima's message even fifty years after her appearance.¹⁰¹ Fatima's warning remained vital due to the dangers posed by "The dragon, Lucifer," who represented "atheist materialism," and threatened to destroy the conservative, Catholic way of life.

Most of the article chronicled the story of the Fatima apparition, but its concluding sections returned to political commentary. However, rather than focusing on the geopolitical implications of Fatima's words, the article instead centred on the interpersonal, everyday politics of Fatima's message regarding the "laws of God." Principally, these concerned the obligations of men toward their families and their faith: "the obligation to remain in our [men's] homes, with our wives and before our children, and in our work."¹⁰² Here Mary's role served as a reminder, not of one's obligation to the nation or of significant political struggles, but of conservative Christianity's everyday duties, such as upholding traditional family structures in which men provide for their families and are active members of their communities. Naturally, these views on gender and family are expected from a conservative Catholic journal. But it is telling that such arguments would be made in relation to a Marian apparition who is most known for serving as a symbol of anticommunism and as a call to arms in the fight against the left both domestically and internationally. In a rhetorical sense, Mary could link the fight against communism to the struggles against the reshaping of social norms.

Roma's attention to Fatima continued throughout the magazine's run. In their seventeenth edition, they published a lengthy article titled "The Message of Fatima," which detailed the full series of Marian apparitions that were seen by the three Portuguese youths who witnessed them, as told by the eldest child, Lúcia dos Santos. She said that when Mary first appeared they were frightened, but the "angel" told them: "Be not afraid. I am the angel of peace. Pray with me."¹⁰³ Subsequent conversations with the apparition were confirmations that the children were speaking with the mother of God as well as that she was herself particularly concerned with, and proud of, Portugal and the rest of the conservative Catholic world.

The very next issue of *Roma* continued in the same vein with an article titled "Prayer to our Lady of Fatima," which was ultimately a prayer. And in keeping with the nature of devotions to Fatima it was not just a prayer, but a request for intercession on a national and regional level on behalf of the children of God, begging that she "in this hour of so many dangers for our country and all the nationals of Latin America put aside the scourge of atheist communism."¹⁰⁴ The prayer continued "on the part of all nations born and raised under the sacred influence of Christian Civilization [sic]," requesting that she "keep alive and increase the repulsion which communism has encountered in all social strata in Latin America."¹⁰⁵ Here *Roma's* editors, and the authors of the piece, tipped their hands – communism was both a major danger in

100. Andrés de Asboth, "Editorial Note," *Roma* no. 5 (1968): 23.

101. Pierre Lemaire, "Fátima, esperanza del mundo," *Roma* no. 9 (1969): 6–17.

102. Lemaire, "Fátima, esperanza del mundo," 7.

103. Editors, "El mensaje de Fátima," *Roma*, no. 16 (1970): 4–10.

104. Editors, "Oración a Nuestra Señora de Fátima," *Roma* no. 17 (1970): 9.

105. Editors, "Oración a Nuestra Señora," 9.

Latin America and something that had already been bested. However, the danger it posed continued and required constant vigilance to be fully defeated.

The prayer continued with a list of the Ten Commandments, an explanation of the communists' violation of them, and a request that Mary intercede in Latin America so that they might be followed. The commandments about God and worship were contrasted with communism's attempts to "extinguish the Faith [sic]," the commandment against murder was confronted with communism's violence in the name of "ideological expansion," and the commandment against bearing false witness by communism's "systematic lies." Still, the greatest grievance was against communism's assault on the family, and thus, against the commandments related to family and gender: "Today communism wishes to break the ties between father and son, deliver education into the hands of the state. It denies the virtue of virginity and teaches that marriage can be dissolved for any reason."¹⁰⁶

These social issues – education, sexual relations, and marriage – were at the heart of how conservative Latin American polemicists talked about Mary in the mid-twentieth century. Mary and Marian devotion – particularly, but not only, in the context of Fatima – was a means to discuss and lament the erosion of what they considered to be sacrosanct family values. These were under assault not only in *Roma's* native Argentina, but in "all the sister nations of Latin America." As noted in the section above, issues of gender and the family were clear candidates for universalizing language, uniting right-wing Catholics who were upset with social and political transformations from Latin America to Europe. In that she appeared to Portuguese youngsters and frequently spoke of their country, Fatima's promise was fundamentally national in nature. However, because of her focus on universal issues like motherhood and family, she helped these observers bridge the gap between the national and the international. Fatima's place in the Church was always one of connection – the *Revista Católica de Santiago* printed an article by Pope John Paul II regarding her role in the late 1970s, arguing that Fatima's place was "close to man" and that prayer to her would bring Catholics "closer to God."¹⁰⁷ Fatima, and the pilgrimages associated with her veneration, were key to "bringing Catholics together" in difficult times and promoting "harmony within our Holy Church."¹⁰⁸ That the *Revista* was in favour of Marian devotion is to be expected, but their focus on this letter – written by the Pope and sent to a priest in Portugal – showed that they believed Mary, particularly her apparition at Fatima, to be a symbol and harbinger of the unity of the global Catholic community as a whole. Fatima was a full embodiment, literally, of the connection between the divine and the familial, the personal and the political, the national and the international.

This article has explored the many ways in which conservative and right-wing Catholic commentators in Latin America used Marian devotion and questions of Marian theology to touch on major social and political issues, issues which were at the heart of their disagreements, not only with the secular world, but with their rivals within the Catholic Church. In addition to serving as a new front in the battle against progressivism and Protestantism within the Church, Mary's position served as a crucial tool for organizing and inspiring the laity to defend long-standing social mores, particularly those that were related to gender and the family. The Second Vatican Council's deliberations over Mary's position in the Church brought these problems to the forefront. For these Catholics, wavering on the theological questions brought up by Marian devotion meant undermining the entire edifice of Catholic tradition and practice as well as the societies founded on it. In these publications, clergy and committed laity showed themselves to be

106. Editors, "Oración a Nuestra Señora," 9.

107. Papa Juan Pablo II, "Plegaria del Papa a la Virgen de Fátima en el mes de Mayo," *Revista Católica de Santiago* (1979), 10.

108. Papa Juan Pablo II, "Plegaria del Papa a la Virgen," 11.

deeply worried over how the Council's reforms, or lack thereof, would impact fundamental aspects of Catholic teaching, stemming from debates over Mary's nature. Questions and uncertainties about Mary and her position in the Church spilled out from their theological bounds and touched on countless other questions. Theology and politics were crucially and complexly mixed. From their perspectives the deep anxieties held by these observers were, entirely justified.

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