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Marian Mariology

Chapter 2



The veneration of Mary, when properly understood, permeates the entire life of the Church; it is a dimension of dogma and of piety, of Christology and of ecclesiology. This dimension needs to be made explicit today in connection with the problems of humanity. Mariology expresses something fundamental to the Christian life itself, to the Christian experience of the world.

Sound Mariology has always been understood in Christological terms. If the Gospel revealed nothing more than the fact that Jesus Christ, God and man, was born of Mary, this alone would be sufficient for the Church to love her and to draw theological conclusions from pondering this relationship of Mother and Son. We need no other revelations. Mary is a self-evident and essential *datum* and dimension of the Gospel.

Chapter one centers on Catechesis flowing from Byzantine Marian spirituality with commentary by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M. Chapter two discusses Mariology today with commentary by Rev. Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J. The remaining chapters are commentaries on various Marian topics by noted theologian Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. (1914– 2000).

Chapter 2

Mariology Today

Rev. Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J.

Vatican Council II in its decree on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, set the direction for the doctrine and practice of Marian devotion in the future. During the decades before its gathering there had been a wave of enthusiastic wave for the promotion of Marian themes and practices. This was not in itself wrong. However, there lurked in it the danger that such emphasis on Mary might lead to the overshadowing and neglect of the important and basic teaching and practices of Christian living. Even in the Council itself there was a strong current of opinion seeking a separate decree on Mary, the Mother of God. Indeed, suggestions were put forward that her role as mediatrix in the life of the Church be defined as a truth divinely revealed. Fortunately the Council Fathers chose another direction. They set forth their teaching on Mary in the eighth chapter of the decree on the Church. It contains a precious and invaluable presentation of the Church's teaching on the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church.

Three documents are of special importance in any future study of Mariology. They are the following: (1) The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter VIII, The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church, 1964; (2) The Apostolic Exhortation; of Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 1974. (3) The Encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 1967

While the first sets out doctrine to be held by the universal Church, the latter two and particularly the last have in view hope of reconciliation with the Orthodox. Two reasons are offered for this hope. Firstly, the break in the unity of the Church universal began with the separation of the eastern and western churches; secondly, these churches already have very much in common on Mary relative to doctrine and in liturgical practice. Accordingly, healing of the breach between them may be the more readily hoped. Mary de Trana, a writer on topics dealing with the Orthodox Church, points out that their difference lies mainly in the emphasis which the western Church places on doctrine while the eastern Church emphasizes devotion and liturgical worship. On one point of Marian doctrine there is some disagreement, namely Mary's Immaculate Conception. The crux of the disagreement lies in the conception of Original Sin.

My purpose here is not to discuss of Mary's place in Ecumenism. It is rather to indicate her place in doctrine and practice today.

The obvious result of the decree of Vatican II on Mary in its document on the Church seems to have been a relaxation, not to say neglect, in devotion to her. There are, I think other causes for this interruption in the devotion. Certainly the action of the Council put a check upon the elaborations and exaggerations found in many writings on Mary during the preceding centuries, at least from the Reformation onwards. A quick perusal of the second volume of Hilda Graef's work, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* offers some indication of this seemingly uncontrolled exuberance. Another cause is the growth of the feminist movement. This shifted the emphasis from concern with Mary to concern for the place of women in the liturgical practices of the Catholic church and in its administration. Add to this the opportunities now offered to women in the social, political, economic and educational spheres. Finally, there is the general apathy toward religion and religious practices that has gripped the public sphere in the past half century. As Luke writes in his Gospel, "when the Son of Man comes, do you think that he will find faith on earth?."

We now turn to the time between after the closure of the Vatican II to our own day. I propose here to divide the material in the following manner, or if you prefer to treat of it under the following headings: Mary in Dogmatic Theology, Mary in Liturgy and Worship, Mary in Ecumenism, Mary and Feminism, Present State of Marian Devotions, A Synthetic Outline of Mariology for Today.

I should like however to introduce what follows with a quotation from a sermon by Isaac of Stella. It will set the tone as well as the situation of Our Lady in the mystery of Christ and the Church, as well as give a context for our discussion.

"The whole Christ and the unique Christ - the body and the head - are one; one because both are born of the same God in heaven, and of the same mother on earth. They are many sons yet one son, Head and members are one son, yet many sons; in the same way, Mary and the church are one mother, yet more than one mother; one virgin yet more than one virgin. Both are mothers, both are virgins. Each conceives of the same Spirit, without concupiscence. Each gives birth to a child of God the Father, without sin. Without any sin Mary gave birth to Christ the head for the sake of the body. By the forgiveness of the slightest taint of sin, the Church gave birth to the body, for the sake of its head. Each is Christ's mother, but neither gives birth to the whole Christ without the cooperation of the other.

In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the virgin Mary, and what is said in a particular sense of the virgin mother. Mary is rightly understood in a general sense of the virgin mother, the Church. When either is spoken of the meaning can be understood of both, almost without qualification. In a way every Christian is also to be believed to be a bride of God's word, a mother of Christ, his daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful. These words are used in the universal sense of the Church, in a special sense of Mary, in a particular sense of the individual Christian. They are used of God's wisdom in person, the Word of the Father.

This is why Scripture says: I will dwell in the inheritance of the Lord. The Lord's inheritance is, in general sense, the Church, in a special sense. Mary, in an individual sense the Christian. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb. He dwells forever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul." [Migne PL. 194.1862 .Sr.51]

This quotation will enable us to distinguish the same term as it is applied either to Christ, to Mary, his mother and to the Church.

Mary in Dogma

As you are aware there are four defined dogmas held by the Church in its teaching on Mary the Mother of God. The first is her divine motherhood, defined in the Council of Ephesus [431] in defense of the divinity of her Son Jesus. The second is the doctrine of her virginity, declaring her to be a virgin before the birth of her Son, in the birthing of her Son and after the birth of her Son so that she is ever-virgin. The third is her Immaculate Conception, declaring that she was preserved free of the stain of original sin from the first moment of her conception. And the final and fourth is the Assumption of her body and soul into heaven.

After Vatican II the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity became a topic of discussion. This discussion did not dispute the doctrine itself. Rather, it sought for its foundations in the Scripture itself. To put this in question form: Is the perpetual virginity of Mary part of the historical data of Scripture or a symbolic statement

6. The Blessed Virgin Mary reached a fullness of perfection which under Christ her Son is supreme in the Church; a fullness (plenitude) not absolute but relative.
7. The Blessed Virgin Mary truly cooperated in the work of redemption through her consent to become the mother of the Word Incarnate, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity.
8. The Blessed Virgin Mary was an associate of her Son the Redeemer in the work of redemption of the human race not only by her compassion and adherence to Him in mind and heart and spirit but also through a deserving understood to be congruent (fitting her status of mother and associate).
9. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the first member of the Church and its type in such fashion that she may truly be called Mother of the Church.
10. The Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed both body and soul into heaven where she dwells with her Son, Jesus, in His state of glory.
11. The Blessed Virgin Mary is a mediatrix in the distribution of graces to humankind.
12. The Blessed Virgin Mary may be fittingly honored by Christians not with the supreme worship [latria] owed to God her Creator but with that degree of worship called huperdulia [the highest honor that can be given a human person].

End

pointing to some theological truth. While some Catholic scholars for example, John McHugh, John Craghan, Geoffrey Graystone find it supported by historical foundations, others, for example, Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmeyer feel that the biblical evidence does not determine its historicity. While it is true that in the biblical narrative of the Infancy of Jesus there are elements of a symbolic nature, yet the same narrative appears to yield some historic evidence. The question remains unresolved.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in 496 and following states clearly the present Catholic teaching on Mary's virginity. Pope John Paul II in his audiences has spoken from time to time of the Virginal Conception as a biological fact and of Mary's intention to remain a virgin.

You will discover on the Internet a program which ridicules and rejects this truth of the Catholic faith. Such action reveals the sad state of our present culture and the biases which we can enslave us.

The Immaculate Conception and Assumption of our Lady.

These dogmas of our faith were in the christotypical tradition taken to be privileges of the Mother of God while from the ecclesiotypical point of view they are seen as signs of what will happen to the Church on its pilgrim way. While they are privileges of the Mother of God in an eminent way they are also privileges to be shared by every Christian in some manner. Mary the most perfectly redeemed becomes a model for Christians giving them the hope of reaching through their conquest of sin and death that state which Mary already enjoys at the throne of God. One view does not negate the other rather it enhances the other. They show the richness and in a sense the in-exhaustiveness of these mysteries.

An unresolved question concerns Mary's death. Was Mary, the Mother of Jesus assumed body and soul into heaven before or after her death. It remains an open question with strong arguments for either side. The dogma of the Assumption states that, "when she had completed her life on earth" she was assumed in body and soul into heaven. Death is a natural part of life; it is a transformation of a person into a new existence; it is also in our present state a consequence of sin. Mary could have undergone death as a transformation, but did death mean for her freedom from the fear and obscurity brought about by sin. The assumption reminds us that death need not be punishment, nor escape from material reality, not an end but a beginning. In Christ life and death are not undone by sin. Mary stands before us as the perfect Christian reminding us of this.

The Mediation of Mary.

Mary is spoken of as redemptrix, as mediatrix, as intercessor. Her role as intercessor is unquestioned among Catholics. She has ever been looked upon and addressed by them as one who can present their requests and their needs to her Son and to the Father, as she implored her Son at Cana on behalf of the wedding guests. There are some Christian bodies however who refuse her this intercessory power. This refusal is tied to a general rejection of the intercession of the saints in the communion of saints. Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* states, "... the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix" These are to be so understood that they do not take away from or add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ, the one Mediator. [L.G. 62]

Mary's mediating role has held an undisputed place in the Catholic tradition. This role does not diminish or derogate from the unique mediation of her Son, rather it enhances it, showing how God in His wisdom and power can engage and subordinate this function of Mary to the mediation of her Son. The Reformers, however, appalled by the abuses which they saw around them and zealous to safeguard the unique mediation of Christ as proclaimed by St. Paul in his letter to Timothy [1 Tim 2:5] opposed this Catholic teaching. What is this Catholic teaching? That "just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by the sacred ministers and by the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is in reality communicated diversely to His creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise among creatures to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this unique source." [L.G. 62]

Cardinal Mercier, in the early decades of this century, sought approbation for this mediation of Mary from the supreme teaching authority and obtained approval for a Mass and Office of Mary, Mediatrix of all Graces. In 1950, the first International Mariological Congress held in Rome submitted this votum to Pius XI:

"...it is the wish of the faithful that it should be dogmatically defined that the Blessed Virgin Mary was intimately associated with Christ the Saviour in effecting human salvation, and, accordingly she is a true collaborator in the work of redemption, spiritual Mother of all men, intercessor and dispenser of graces, in a word, universal Mediatrix of God and men." [A.S.C. 1.234]

Although debated and discussed at some length in Vatican II. The Fathers did not define this teaching while including it among the titles given her. Since the Council there has been a growing movement seeking an infallible pronouncement declaring that Mary is "Coredemptrix, Mediatrix of All Graces and Advocate for the People of God" In the last four years according to Newsweek [25 August] the Pope has received 4,340,429 signatures from 157 countries supporting the dogma. No one yet knows what the Pope may decide.

Furthermore Mariology has disappeared for the most from the theological disciplines, and writings on Mary are fewer. The Rosary, which formerly was a very often repeated prayer publicly and privately is today much less frequently heard.

Having said all this still I do believe that there is a slowly progressive return to devotion to her, at least, in various localities. One evidence of this is the crowds who visit the Shrine in Medjugorje. Another is the promotion of devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. There is also the growing desire on the part of some Catholics to have the truth of Mary's mediation solemnly defined. Against TV and the Internet of late present programs with her as the subject. Pope John Paul II with his motto *totus tuus* and his personal devotion to the Blessed Mother of God leads his people in this return.

A Synthetic Outline of Mariology

1. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of the World.
2. The Blessed Virgin Mary of whom Jesus was conceived was a virgin before, during and after His begetting.
3. The Blessed Virgin Mary is truly and properly the Mother of God in as much as the child born of her, Jesus, is truly and really God.
4. The Blessed Virgin Mary is not only the mother of Jesus but also His associate in His mission from His Father.
5. The Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved in the first instance of her conception from all stain of original sin; and this by a singular grace and privilege of God in view of the stature of Christ, the Savor of all humankind.
 - A. The Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved from all inordinate desire and from all concupiscence as well as from all personal sin.
 - B. The Blessed Virgin Mary endured the consequence of the sin of nature (origin) which did not redound to the detriment of her moral perfection.
 - C. The consequence of this sin of nature did not have for her the character of a punishment but of a closer likeness with her Son Jesus, in His mission of redemption.

Mary in Liturgy and Worship

for herself, to engage in pursuits outside the home, find fulfillment in the procession of medicine, social work, research, military service, law, politics, or ministry. And this freedom is often a necessity in order to provide for a fitting existence of the individual herself and the entire family. So while Mary is still the ideal mother, she is also the ideal woman engaged in occupations that were once the domain of her male counterpart.

From the philosophical side the feminist movement insists that sexual differentiation does not mean subordination but complementarity. This differentiation simply manifests the different distribution of the human qualities shared in by every person, since every individual is a mixture of masculine and feminine traits. Feminists, at least moderate feminists, believe that the symbol, which is Mary, can be adjusted to the present sense of the role of women in our world and to the structural changes taking place in the Church and in society. Mary can remind us that God has feminine as well as masculine traits. She can help the male experience the feminine side, particularly that quality of receptivity so needful in our day. For receptivity does not mean powerlessness or subjugation, as A. Tambasco notes in his book, *What Are They Saying about Mary*, but the ability to listen and to come to the aid of others.

Mary's *Fiat* shows that woman's receptivity includes an active element, and her triumphant hymn, *The Magnificat*, a program of action which would revolutionize the world.

While there may be strident voices in the feminist movement, yet we must be open to the legitimate claims of their cause and promote what is fitting, fair and just in their appeal. You will find a summary statement on Feminist Mariology in *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, ed. Ursula King (NY: Orbis, 1994).

The Present State of Marian Devotion

One author [Jean-Pierre Prevost] has remarked that as yet no dogmatic synthesis or full study on Mariology has appeared that fully incorporates the teaching of Vatican II. This may be fortunate, for prior to the Council the theological treatise on Mariology had become cut off to a great extent from those of her Son and of other dogmatic treatises. For this reason, perhaps, Catholics were charged with giving the role of the Holy Spirit to Mary. While this was not true yet, the emphasis and the appearance of a separate treatise could give such an impression.

That there was a slackening in devotions to Mary after Vatican II was clearly evident. Various indications of this may be gathered from the following observations. First I think that it is true to say that now we hardly ever hear preaching on Our Lady. Again while the feasts of the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption and the Annunciation have been retained, others have been dropped or reduced to memorials.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary has grown though the ages. In the early days of the Church's life the emphasis was upon the person and work of Christ. The declaration in the Council of Ephesus 431 A.D. that Mary is truly the Mother of God, in reality a christological statement meant to safeguard the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, awakened the faithful to an awareness of the mother of Jesus in their Christian beliefs.

There has ever been a strong devotion to the Blessed Mother of God in the Eastern Church. Before Ephesus there was only one liturgical feast of Mary, that of the Purification and this was celebrated only in certain areas. But after Ephesus feasts began to multiply: Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven at the beginning of the 6th century; the Conception of Mary at the end of the 7th century. Advances towards its union with the Western Church are manifest in the visit of Paul VI to Jerusalem on the feast of the Epiphany 1964, the first meeting of Pope and Ecumenical Patriarch in 900 years. Paul VI's encyclical *Signum Magnum* draws attention to the common elements of devotion to Mary found in the Eastern and Western Churches. Later Pope John Paul II met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Rome in 1994. He writes in his Encyclical *Mater Redemptoris*, "I wish to emphasize how profoundly the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church and the ancient churches of the East feel united by love and praise of the Theotokos."

While in the Eastern Churches the emphasis is upon liturgy and devotion to Mary, the Western Church gives greater emphasis to doctrine and dogma. Mary de Trana makes this point, and valid one, in her article, *Paul VI and John Paul II on Mary*. Evidence of this may be found in the contrast between the countless verses of Marian hymns sung in the liturgical cycle of the Orthodox Churches and the comparatively few hymns to Mary in the Roman Catholic liturgy. [*Mary for Everyone*, p.183]

Liturgical and non Liturgical Devotions.

Both the Western and Eastern Churches have liturgical devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Roman Catholic Church her feast days are listed in the Roman Liturgical Calendar. The Consilium set up by Paul VI to carry out the liturgical reform reduced the total number of feasts to fourteen feasts of Our Lord and thirteen of Our Lady. Five feasts of the Our Lord -- Annunciation, Nativity, Epiphany, Holy Family and Presentation -- involve Our Lady. Of the thirteen feasts given to her, three are solemnities: the Mother of God, the Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption; two have festive rank: the Birth of Mary and the Visitation; three are ordinary memorials: the Presentation, the Queenship, Our Lady of the Rosary; four

are optional memorials: Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Our Lady of Lourdes, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, our Lady of the Snows and the Saturday Mass to Our Lady. There is also the Little Office of Our Lady which according to Vatican II. SC.98 is now part of the public prayer of the Church.

In addition to these liturgical services to our Lady, there are numerous public and private devotions, arising from popular piety, many of which approved by the Church. For example, Devotion to our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, to Our Lady of the Scapular, to our Lady of the Way and many others. As Vatican II L.G. 67 states, "The Church has approved various forms of piety towards the Mother of God within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine in keeping with circumstances of time and place and with the character and genius of the faithful."

Apparitions and Shrines

In our present age the number of apparitions of Our Lady, especially to children with public effect on the Church, seems to have grown. Between her appearance to Catherine Labouré in 1830 to the children in Medjugorje in 1981, she has appeared to the two children of La Salette in 1846; to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes in 1858; to the brothers in Pontmain in 1871; at Knock in 1879; indeed between the years 1928 and 1971 a total of 217 appearances of Our Lady are recorded. Since 1970 apparitions are reported in Akita, Japan 1973; in Betania, Venezuela, 1981; in Cuapa, Nicaragua, 1980 in Medjugorie, 1981; in Kibeho, Africa 1981; in San Nicolas, Argentina, 1983; in Mt. Melleray, Ireland, 1984; in Naju, North Korea, 1985; in Souphanieh, Syria, 1986; in Cuenca, Ecuador, 1988; in Scottsdale, Arizona, 1988; in Mayfield, Ireland, 1988. Some of these have received official approval, others not as yet. The treatment of some who have received and reported these visions has been, upon many accounts, quite disgraceful. Here is an instance or two to illustrate. One visionary was given the choice of official retraction or leaving the convent. To her honor she refused to sign a falsehood and was banished from the community. Five bishops, so she said, had signed a statement that she was a fraud; four of them had never met her. Thirty years later she was, to the credit of her Community, reinstated. We recall how Joan of Arc was treated by order of Bishop Cauchon and burned at the stake.

What criteria or standards are applied to verify such apparitions or visions? I simply list them here: sufficient information; orthodox doctrine; transparency, i.e., direction of the visionary to God; no preoccupation with oneself; signs of divine action; good fruits; acceptance by the *sensus fidelium*; the attitude of Church authority.

The Church, as her duty, has been vigilant in following these apparitions. While she has given public approval to some, to Lourdes and Fatima for example, to others she is concerned mainly to protect the piety and right worship of her people and hesitates to offer any official endorsement.

We are familiar with the shrines dedicated to Our Lady; Walsingham, Lourdes, Fatima, Cestachowa. They have been places of pilgrimage for many years and have served to draw through devotion to the Blessed Mother of God many people to Christ and to awareness of his concern and care for his creatures.

Mary and Ecumenism

I begin by recalling a number of societies whose objective is to resolve the difficulties which many especially non-catholics feel about Mary when they reflect upon her prominence in Catholic teaching and devotion. One such is the ESBVM [The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary] established in London by Martin Gillett, a convert to Catholicism with its branch in Washington, U.S.A. Among those with a wider scope are *The International Marian Pontifical Academy* in Rome and the *Secretariat* [renamed Council by John Paul II] for *Unity of Christians*; *The International Marian Research Institute* at the University of Dayton, which publishes the periodical *Marian Studies* as well as the proceedings of the Mariological Society of America. You are undoubtedly aware of the dialogues on ecumenical topics which have taken and continue to take place among various groups of Catholics and non-Catholics. For example, The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, ARCIC [The Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission.] While the discussion on Mary has not yet reached center stage, one group composed of Lutherans, Anglicans, Reformed, Orthodox, and Catholics meeting in Malta in 1983 to discuss the theme: *Mary and Reconciliation* issued a statement on Mary and the Communion of Saints in which they acknowledged the place of Mary in this Communion, relative to Christ who confers upon her a singular role of the christological order. They went on to say that there is nothing preventing us from uniting our prayer to God in the Spirit with that of the heavenly liturgy and especially with that of the Mother of God. While this agreement settles one hurdle there are still others to be surmounted.

Mary and Feminism

The sources of feminist theology are two, one practical, the other more philosophical. We are witnesses to a revolution in the life of women and of their expectations especially in our First World. We acknowledge that during the past few decades, due to industrial, scientific, technological, social and economical advances, family and private life as well, have undergone changes in their structures and activities. The world has entered into their home life through radio, television and now the computer. Mary under these new influences is no longer seen merely as the model of the domestic woman bound to the duties required of the mother of the family, tied to home life, but also as the liberated woman, free to choose a career