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Marian Mariology

Chapter 5



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 5

The Handmaid of Humanity: Mary, Woman of Salvation History

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

Pope John Paul's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is so deep and pronounced that it is not surprising that she finds a place of honor in almost everything he says and writes. In Poland, at the shrine of Our Lady of Jasna Gora, he addressed this prayer to Mary:

"Once more I consecrate myself to you in your maternal slavery of love. *Totus Tuus* 'I am all yours.' I consecrate to you the whole Church everywhere, to the end of the earth I consecrate to you humanity; all men and women; my brothers and Sisters; all peoples and all the nations. I consecrate to you Europe and all the continents. I consecrate to you Rome and Poland, united by a fresh bond of love, through your servant.

Mother accept us! Mother do not abandon us! Mother be our guide!"

In Mexico at the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in his stirring prayer to Mary, he once again made an act of consecration.

Finally, **Mary, the Woman of History**. Mary has remained for all ages the model for all mankind to imitate. The prophecy she made in the Magnificat, "all generations shall call me blessed" has been literally fulfilled. She has become the "Woman of History" without intending it; she had learned from the Son, Whom she bore, that God chooses those who are little in their own eyes to do great things for Him. She knew what her Son meant when later on, He taught "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart." She learned from experience that God uses humility to do what He wants in order to save and sanctify the world.

There is, in all our hearts, an ambition to greatness, while the real key to greatness is to remain small. The more humble we are, the greater we shall become. As Mary's Son foretold All those who humble themselves will infallibly be exalted, even on earth but especially in Heaven; not only in time but for all eternity; and not only before men, but what is more important in the eyes of God.

End

"Mother of Mercy. Teacher of hidden and silent sacrifice, to you who comes to meet us sinners, we dedicate on this day all our being and all our love. We give to you our lives, our work, our joys, our infirmities and all our sorrows."

In Ireland, he told the people that it was Our Lady of Knock who had brought him to the land of St. Patrick, and 500,000 people cheered his words.

Let it be noted further, that the inscription on Pope John Paul's coat of arms is the lone letter M which stands for Maria.

On October 7th, the last day of the Sovereign Pontiff's visit to America, where his formal address at Washington D.C. was to be to the Women Religious, he first spoke to all the people about the Mother of God.

"My first desire in this National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception is to direct my thoughts; to turn my heart to the *Woman of Salvation History*.

In the eternal design of God, this Woman, Mary, was chosen to enter into the work of the Incarnation and Redemption. And this design of God was to be actuated through her free decision given in obedience to the Divine Will. Through her 'yes,' a yes that pervades and is reflected in all history, she consented to be the Virgin Mother of our Saving God, the Handmaid of the Lord and at the same time the Mother of all the faithful, who in the course of time would be the brothers and sisters of her Son.

Through her, the Sun of Justice was to rise in the world. Through her, the great healer of humanity; the reconciler of hearts and consciences; her Son, the God-Man Jesus Christ, was to transform the human condition and by His death and resurrection, uplift the entire human family.

As a great sign that appeared in the heavens, in the fullness of time, this Woman is to dominate all history as the Virgin Mother of the Son, as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit - as the Handmaid of humanity.

And this Woman becomes also, by association with her Son the sign of contradiction to the world and, at the same time, the sign of hope whom all generations will call blessed: the Woman who conceived spiritually before she conceived physically; the Woman who accepted the Word of God and who was inserted intimately and irrevocably into the mystery of the Church, exercising a spiritual motherhood with regard to all peoples; the Woman who is honored as Queen of the Apostles, without herself being inserted into the hierarchical constitution of the Church.

And yet this Woman made all hierarchy possible, because she gave to the world the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. This Mary of the Gospels, who is not mentioned as being at the Last Supper, comes back again at the foot of the Cross in order to consummate her contribution to salvation history. By her courageous act, she prefigures and anticipates the courage of all women throughout the ages who concur in bringing forth Christ in every generation.

At Pentecost the Virgin Mother once again advances to exercise her role, in union with the Apostles, with, in, and over the Church She conceives the Holy Spirit to bring forth Jesus in the fullness of His Body, the Church - never to leave Him, never to abandon Him, but to continue to love and serve Him through the ages.

This is the Woman of History and Destiny who inspires us today - the woman who speaks to us of femininity, human dignity, and love and who is the greatest expression of total consecration to Jesus Christ in Whose Name we are gathered here today.

There are many facets of Marian faith and piety contained in this preliminary address which the Pope gave the day before he left the United States. We can only choose a few for our further thought. Let us consider: Mary the Woman of Freedom: Mary as the Sign of Contradiction and Hope: Mary Queen of the Apostles, and Mary, the Woman of History.

Mary the Woman of Freedom. The Holy Father stressed the fact that Mary freely chose to become the Mother of Christ and therefore the Mother of God. We believe that under God's Providence, the salvation of the world depended on Mary's 'Fiat' "Be it done to me as Thou wilt." This tells us first that God though Almighty wants our voluntary cooperation with Him that others may be redeemed.

There are only two ultimate mysteries in Christianity: in heaven, the Trinity, on earth, man's liberty. They are mysteries that we cannot comprehend. But though mysteries we must believe them, - that the God Who made the sun, moon and stars, Who made us 'without us', will not redeem us 'without us'. That is the first lesson - Mary's liberty determined man's redemption.

The second lesson is that sinless Mary was impeccable, preserved by an extraordinary grace from God from ever being capable of offending God by deliberate sin. Yet though impeccable Mary was able to choose. This bears emphasis. We are so accustomed to identifying freedom as choosing between good and evil that we forget the highest use of our liberty is not to choose "not to sin", but rather to choose to do more than we have to do or that we are obliged to do - in a word, to choose to be generous. Like Mary, then, we can choose to give God more than He demands under pain of sin. We can choose to love God with our whole heart and not just to avoid His punishment.

Mary, the Sign of Contradiction and Hope. She is indeed a sign of contradiction because, humanly speaking, it seems contradictory to obtain by yielding; to get by giving. Yet that is what Mary teaches us. We gain most when we give most; we grow when we give up; we merit before God when we surrender. You don't explain that - you believe it. Mary is also the sign of Hope because we see in her what marvels God can do in human nature. She was told by the Angel and believed that "nothing is impossible with God". Mary's whole life proved how right she was. She shows us what it is to hope from God for everything, provided we give God everything.

Mary, Queen of the Apostles. The Pope declared that Mary without being inserted into the Church's hierarchy, as she was no Bishop nor Priest, yet she was the Woman who made all hierarchy possible, because she gave to the world the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. If our zeal is truly apostolic; if we want to win souls for Christ and for Heaven; if we are ambitious to conquer the world; let us look at Mary. By her hidden conformity with God's Providence and her generous cooperation with His Will, she became greater than all the Apostles, indeed their Queen. From the first century until the end of time, God uses the obedient, the docile and the simple to achieve His redemptive designs. Those do most in the apostolate who are most submissive to the Will of God. Brains, ability, education, money, are sometimes meaningless.

God builds His Kingdom on obedience: He saves souls through conformity to His Will.