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Marian Mariology

Chapter 17



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 2 discusses Mariology today with commentary by Rev. Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J. The remaining chapters are commentaries on various Marian topics by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. (1914– 2000).

Chapter 17

Love for Mary, Model of Consecrated Life

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

The word “model” has been cheapened in the English language. Among other definitions in the latest third International Dictionary, a model is defined as “one who is employed to display clothes or merchandise, as in a fashion show, in a photograph or on television.”

Yet we know that a model is much more, and for our purpose is far more sublime. Model is a person worthy of imitation. A model is someone who is perfect and therefore serves as a pattern or standard for others to follow.

Our subject is “Love for Mary, Model of Consecrated Life.” My purpose here is to look at the Blessed Virgin Mary as the exemplar of consecrated life. And my approach will be to prayerfully reflect on this subject from the following viewpoints:

- What is consecrated life?
- Why does consecrated life desperately need a standard in our day?
- How is Mary the perfect, totally human, model of consecrated life?

We will conclude with a short prayer.

What is Consecrated Life?

In the language of the Church, consecrated life, by the profession of the evangelical counsels, is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely, under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God, who is loved most of all.

A consecrated person, therefore,

- Professes the evangelical *counsels*
- They follow Christ *more* closely under the action of the Holy Spirit,
- They are *totally* dedicated to God, whom they love most of all.

Three terms in the foregoing definition of consecrated life belong to its essence, namely *counsels*, *more* and *totally*.

What does this mean? It means that:

- Consecrated persons not only obey the evangelical precepts. They profess the evangelical counsels. In other words, consecrated persons not only submit to the commands of Jesus Christ. They go beyond submission to what *must* be done by every Christian. They undertake to live a life of generosity that does not stop with what is obligatory under pain of sin. They choose to follow not only God's imperative will, but also His inviting will. In a word, they profess not only the law, but the options of the Gospel.
- Consecrated persons, therefore, follow Christ more closely than those who do not profess the evangelical counsels. The word "more" is crucial. Every Christian believer must follow Christ. But some people have the grace to follow in His footsteps more than others. Not everyone receives this special grace. Those who do, have a calling to the consecrated life.
- Finally, consecrated persons are totally dedicated to God, who is loved most of all. Here the key word is *total*. Once again, only those who receive the special grace to such total self-giving to God become consecrated persons. Their love of God is total in sacrifice, by their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience; it is total in duration because their dedication is for life – no one receives a temporary vocation to the consecrated life – and the dedication is total in service to the Church, it is not a mere business or even a profession. It is a whole-hearted service of the Mystical Body of Christ.

So much, briefly on *what* is consecrated life.

Now we ask ourselves, “Why does consecrated life desperately need a standard in our day?”

Notice, we are saying “desperately” needs a “standard” in our day. What consecrated persons need today is no mere model in the worldly sense of some fanciful or romantic ideal. Consecrated persons today need an objective standard by which they are to know what consecrated life is in the first place. They need an objective norm for their minds by which they can measure whether they are living a consecrated life at all, and how consecrated their life truly is.

Why do I say that consecrated life today *desperately* needs such a standard or norm? The reason is because in one so-called developed country after another, tens of thousands of persons have abandoned what, for centuries, has been considered consecrated life.

The revolution is so deep and so widespread. It is so devastating in its consequences, that nothing but a radical reformation – that is, a reformation at its roots – can restore consecrated life in the Western world to its Gospel origins.

Before our conference is over, I will, of course, propose this radical reformation – in detail and at some length – in terms of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But for a few more minutes, I wish to spell out what I believe are the three main roots of the desecration of what wants to be consecrated life.

These roots are:

- A loss of faith in the true divinity of Jesus Christ. In other words, disbelief in the Incarnation.
- A loss of humility in a person’s humble submission to the will of God. In other words, pride.
- And a loss of the meaning of sacrifice out of love for God. In other words, a lust for pleasure.

Loss of faith in Christ’s divinity, willful pride and a lust for the pleasures of this world are – in my judgment – at the root of the most serious crisis in consecrated life in the history of the Catholic Church.

We now come to the main purpose of our conference. I have no doubt that this crisis cannot be resolved without going back to the foundations of consecrated life. These foundations are found in the life and virtues of the Blessed Virgin. She must provide

True consecrated life is a life that knows the difference between pleasure and joy.

Pleasure is what the world has to offer its followers. Joy is what Christ promises His followers.

When Mary sang the Magnificat, she did not say, “My body takes satisfaction in the pleasures of this world.” But she said, “My soul rejoices in God my Savior.”

Consecrated life is meant to be a life of joy, true joy, deep joy, joy in spirit, but joy in the Lord.

The price of experiencing this joy is the sacrifice of worldly pleasures, even as Mary sacrificed worldly pleasures to conform to the life of her Son, and to cooperate with Him in the redemption of the world.

Prayer

“Mary, Mother of God, your life of consecration is the model of our consecrated life. It is the standard for us to follow. It is the norm for us to imitate.

“Obtain for us from your Son, the light to believe that He is our God.

“Obtain for us the humility, like you, to always tell God, “Let it be done to me according to your will.

“Above all, obtain for us the strength to forego the pleasures of this world so that, like You, we may enjoy the intimacy of God’s loving embrace – in time and for all eternity. Amen.”

End

the standard or norms by which consecrated life must be lived if it is to be a life of consecration and not desecration.

How is Mary the Model of Consecrated Life

Given the premises we have so far spelled out, it is not difficult to see how the Blessed Virgin is the standard by which consecrated life must be reformed if it is to be a consecrated life, and not some pseudo counterfeit.

Faith in the Divinity of Jesus Christ. This faith is the absolute basis of consecrated life, and Mary had this faith.

At the Annunciation, the angel told her, “Mary, you have won God’s favor. You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High.”

Mary heard this prediction about Jesus, that He was to be the Son of the Most High God. And she believed it.

At Mary’s Visitation to her kinswoman, Elizabeth, she was greeted by Elizabeth with the words, “Of all the women, you are the most blessed and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Then Elizabeth’s exclamation, “Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?” And finally, Elizabeth concluded by telling Mary, “The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Yes, blessed is she who has believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

What was the promise? The promise was that Mary would conceive the natural Son of God. The promise was that she was to become the Mother of the Lord. And Mary believed it. She really believed it. She believed that for nine months she was carrying her Creator in her womb. She believed that on Christmas morning, she held the living God-become-man in her arms. She believed that for thirty years she was in the intimate company of Yahweh-become-flesh, who dwelt in her home.

How those who profess to live a consecrated life need this faith of Mary in the Divinity of her Son!

With this faith, everything in a consecrated life makes sense; without this faith in Christ’s Divinity, everything in so-called consecrated life is nonsense.

Why should I give up marriage and the legitimate joys of married life, unless I believed that Jesus Christ did this before me, and for me? And I believe that Jesus Christ is my God in human form.

Why should I give up material possessions and the independent use of material goods unless I believed that Jesus Christ became poor and lived a life of dependent poverty before me and out of love for me? And I believed that Jesus Christ is the Lord of heaven and earth who became man was born in a stable, lived the life of a workman, had not whereon to lay His head, and was buried in a stranger's tomb.

Why should I give up the independent use of my free will in so many areas of human living? Why should I even dream of giving up my obedience to another human being unless I believed that Jesus Christ became obedient – to Mary and Joseph, and then to the unjust decision of Pontius Pilate – before me and to teach me. And I believe that this obedient Christ is the Lord of the Universe whom the sun, moon and stars obey – and I believe that this King of creation is Jesus of Nazareth who became man to show me how pleasing is obedience to Almighty God?

Humble Submission to the Will of God. If faith in Christ's divinity is the bedrock of consecrated life, submission to the will of God is the language of consecrated life. And Mary spoke this language during her entire life on earth.

Again at the Annunciation, after the angel had explained to Mary how what is impossible to men becomes possible with God, she told the angel, "Be it done to me according to your word."

When the time for her delivery was approaching and she was to go to Bethlehem to give birth to her Son in a place where animals are stalled, because there was no room for her at the inn, she submitted humbly to the will of God.

When she had to flee with Jesus and Joseph to Egypt, she humbly accepted the will of God.

At every stage in her life, she lived out what she said at the Annunciation, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

Humble resignation to the will of God, humble resignation to the Providence of God, humble obedience to the mysterious designs of God, humble acceptance of everything from the hands of God – this was the pattern of Mary's consecrated life. And this is the standard for all consecrated life since the first century of Christianity. How those who profess to live the consecrated life need to follow this indispensable norm of consecration today!

Why should I surrender my will to the sometimes heroic demands of consecrated living unless I know that another human person, the Blessed Virgin Mary, had done so before me?

Why should I not stand up for my own rights, unless I had the example of Mary to inspire me.

Unlike her Son, Mary was a human person. Like us, she had to live by faith and hope. Her total, constant, unqualified and absolute surrender to the divine will in selfless humility is the model – and what a model – for me to imitate.

Sacrifice of Worldly Pleasure. Faith in Christ's divinity, we said, is the foundation of authentic consecrated life. Humble submission to the will of God, we said, is the language of consecrated life. And the sacrifice of worldly pleasure is the atmosphere of consecrated life. This is the air that consecrated persons are to breathe, and outside of this atmosphere, they suffocate and die.

Mary's whole life was a life of sacrifice. She not only submitted to the will of God, she endured, we may say, the will of God by her loving sacrifice.

Her Son, we are told, having joy set before Him, chose the Cross. Mary, His Mother, like Him, also chose the Cross.

This mystery of choosing the Cross instead of worldly pleasure is brought home to us during the prophecy made by Simeon when Christ was presented in the Temple. "You see this Child," he told Mary. "He is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel. He is destined to be a sign that is rejected. And a sword will pierce your soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare."

This is it! What was Mary's source of sacrifice? It was joining in the sacrifice of her Son. She wanted to be like Jesus, who sacrificed all merely earthly joys in order to redeem the world.

We come to our final question. Why should I surrender all that consecrated life demands of me unless, like Mary, I want to live a life of self-sacrifice? But why should I do so? Why? Because Mary did so. But why did she make a life-long sacrifice? Because of her great love for Jesus, whose whole life was a life of redemptive sacrifice.

Jesus Christ, we believe, redeemed the world by giving up whatever the world holds dear. Mary united herself with Jesus to cooperate with Him in the redemption of a sinful mankind.

As a consecrated person, why should I cooperate with Mary's Son in His work of salvation? Why? Because I want to be like Him who was rejected by the world that He came to save and sealed this worldly rejection by His death on the Cross.

Let us be as clear as possible. True consecrated life is not respected by the world. It is rejected by the world.