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PRESENTING MARY TO TODAY'S CATHOLICS

The Second Vatican Council gave promise of a renewal of Marian theology and devotion. Pope Paul VI hailed Chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* as the greatest Marian document ever drawn up by an Ecumenical Council. Because of the solid biblical foundation of the Marian chapter of *Lumen Gentium* some Protestant theologians have turned their attention to Our Lady's role in the mystery of redemption. They are coming to recognize with Dr. John Macquarrie (now the occupant of the prestigious Lady Margaret Chair of Divinity of Oxford) that a theologian can not treat of Christ and the Church without reference to her who is the mother of Christ and the Archetype of Church. Macquarrie insists on the relevance of Marian theology and devotion for Christian living. "If we have consistently held throughout this book that theological thinking must be rooted in the existential dimension of faith, we have maintained equally that practical attitudes have to be correlated with theological reflection and, where necessary, corrected by it. It seems to me, however, that it is precisely a renewed theological consideration of the issues involved that will increasingly lead Protestants (as it has led some of them already) to abandon their negative attitudes toward Mary, and to join with their Catholic brethren (and with the New Testament) in a glad *Ave Maria!*"¹ All this is very encouraging and confirms the wisdom of the Council Fathers in their decision to treat of Our Lady not in a special schema, but in the great Dogmatic Constitution on The Church. What is very discouraging, even alarming, is the decline of Catholic

¹ John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York, 1966) 357.

devotion to Mary since the close of the Council and Catholic theologians' seeming neglect of Mariology. Hopefully, these are passing phenomena due to an overreaction to the distortions and exaggerations both of Marian devotion and Mariology in some regions of the Catholic world. But, I think also, that theologians have not followed the direction of Vatican II and developed a relevant theology of Mary, the Archetype of the Church, our sister (to employ a title used on several occasions by Pope Paul VI), the model of the faith, love, and hope that every believing Christian must emulate.

Today we observe in Catholic Christology a healthy reaction to the latent monophysitic tendencies which for centuries have colored Catholic piety and preaching.² Theologians are now focusing attention on the humanity of Christ; on the limitations of his human knowledge, on the reality of his human growth and development from infancy through childhood and adolescence to mature manhood. They point to the indications in the Gospels of the very human spiritual struggle Jesus endured in the days of his flesh. Similarly, I think that theologians and preachers, following the Council which held up Our Lady as the Archetype of the Church, should focus the attention of our Catholic people on Mary the woman of faith; who walked in the obscurity of faith; who hoped in God's promise even when all seemed hopeless; who has been made by God a sign of the destiny in which we all hope to share, the glory of the Lord's resurrection. The theologians who are seriously striving to follow the directives of Vatican II speak much of commitment, of involvement, and of hope. The Council presents Our Lady as the exemplar of a committed, concerned and expectant Church.

Ecclesiastical triumphalism is unrealistic, even silly when one considers the minority position of Catholicism and the in-

² As long ago as 1936 Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. in a conversation with the author characterized Catholic piety and preaching about Christ as "subconsciously Monophysitic."

creasing secularization of what used to be thought of as the Christian West. The Church is not the Kingdom of God. The power of the Kingdom is operative in her through the Spirit which her Risen Lord has given her, but the Church is not the Kingdom. She is the servant of the Kingdom, called to carry on the mission of Jesus the Servant of the Lord, who in complete commitment to the Father gave Himself on the Cross for the world's salvation and has become, through the Resurrection, the exemplar and cause of the glorious destiny to which in Him God has called mankind. While the Church waits patiently for the Act of God which will usher in the glorious Kingdom, she has a job to do. Christians baptized into Christ are called to commit themselves with Christ to the service of mankind and the world with a firm hope in the coming of the Kingdom. The Second Vatican Council followed the New Testament Marian teaching when it presented Our Lady as the exemplar of discipleship, the Archetype of the Church, the model of Christian commitment, involvement and a sign of mankind's participation in the Lord's Resurrection.

Let us look at the Annunciation narrative of Luke's Gospel. The evangelist has skillfully constructed his narrative from Old Testament phrases and allusions in order to express his faith and the faith of the Church of the closing decades of the first century in the mystery of Jesus' mission and person. Jesus was conceived by the power of God in the virginal womb of Mary; He is the Messiah and the Son of God. Mary is the *kecharitōmenē*, "the highly graced" virgin daughter of Zion who becomes, through obedient faith, the Christ-bearer. But Luke also tells us something about Mary the woman. Mary enters the stage of salvation-history as a virgin engaged to be married. May we not presume that she shared the desires and the dreams common to engage young women? She was anticipating hopefully a long life of wedded happiness with Joseph and with the children with which she hoped God would bless their union. God suddenly breaks into her existence call-

ing her to become the virgin-mother of the Messiah. Mary surrenders herself in obedient faith. This is the moment when the Eschaton enters history. It is then that Mary, for the sake of the Kingdom, renounces the joys of wedded life and dedicates herself in virginity to God's work.³ The Infancy Gospel of Matthew, while constructed by the evangelist to express his theology on Jesus the new Moses and the perfect Israel, explicitly affirms the Church's belief in Jesus' virginal conception. I think it also gives us a hint about the trial and suffering into which Mary's *fiat* plunged her. Joseph's perplexity and anguish when he learns of Mary's pregnancy; his decision to break the engagement secretly—these are, indeed, details created by the evangelist to introduce his story of Joseph's dream and the revelation of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus, who is the Emmanuel of prophecy. But is not the Evangelist also hinting that, at least in his opinion, Mary's miraculous motherhood occasioned an agonizing problem for her and her fiancé?

Does not Luke indicate Mary's pilgrimage in the dark night of faith when he observes that she "did not understand" the boy Jesus' remark: "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" Mary's pilgrimage of faith finally led her to the foot of the Cross on Calvary.⁴ The Council points to Mary's Assumption as a sign of sure hope and solace for God's pilgrim People. "In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the mother of Jesus continues in this present world

³ In the N.T. teaching, the value of virginity is always placed within an eschatological framework. Cf. 1 Cor. 7:25-35; Mt. 19: 10-12. Cf. E. Maly, *Virginity in the New Testament*, in MS 13 (1962) 41-61; J. Blinzer, "Eisin eynochoi." *Zur Auslegung von Mt. 19:12*, in ZNTW 28 (1957) 254-270; E. Neuhäusler, *Ruf Gottes und Stand des Christen. Bemerkungen zu 1 Kor. 7*, in BZ 3 (1959) 43-60.

⁴ If one accepts, as I do, the hypothesis of some Catholic theologians and N.T. scholars that Mary had no knowledge of the divinity of her Son until after His Resurrection, then her vigil on Calvary is more pathetic. Cf. R. Kugelman, *Mariology and Recent Biblical Literature*, in MS 18 (1967) 127-132.

as the image and first flowering of the Church as she is to be perfected in the world to come. Mary shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, as a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God."⁵ Mary is *a* sign of hope, not *the* sign. The sign and the foundation of our hope is the Risen Lord. Mary assumed into Heaven points to the Lord's Resurrection as the exemplar and the cause of our glorious destiny. Here, again, I see the relevance of Mary for today's Catholics. The Resurrection is being questioned. Even in Catholic theological circles we have heard the strange hypothesis which would reduce the resurrection of Jesus to his survival after death. The doctrine of Mary's assumption reminds us of the apostolic witness to the Lord's bodily resurrection and of our hope of sharing in the Lord's Resurrection.

If we follow the lead of Vatican II and present Mary as the exemplar of the pilgrim People of God and as a sign of the destiny for which we hope we shall strike a responsive chord in the hearts of Christians concerned with commitment and involvement, and living in hope. Mary our sister, walking in the obscurity of faith is the model of the Church, not the almost super-human being created by the exaggerated speculation of some Mariologists of the past.

REV. RICHARD KUGELMAN, C.P.

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⁵ *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Ch. VIII, #68. In W. Abbot, S.J. (Ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York, 1966) 95.