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Moorman: A Christian Marriage and the Mystery of Mary

A Christian Marriage and the Mystery of Mary

Eileen Moorman

When I started to prepare my talk for this evening, I was at first apprehensive about how to approach the subject of Christian marriage and the mystery of Mary. I kept thinking of the hundreds of books and papers written on marriage alone, and then to have to read hundreds more articles and books on Mary—well—needless to say—I was justifiably overwhelmed!

Then I settled down! I realized the best approach for me was to share my reflections on how Mary has influenced my experience of what marriage is.

If what I have to say is true, then the validity of my experience should be of help to all of you here, whether you are married or not. Doesn't a valid truth touch all forms of lifestyles by analogy?

To clarify what might be abstruse in my thinking, let me share with you the experience of how it came to be that I am here.

Last spring Father Bert and I were discussing this program, and Father asked, "Would you be willing to speak on marriage and Mary?" Because Father is a good friend of the Moormans', and because he never hesitates to say yes to our requests, I answered, "Yes." Only later, did I say, "This man must be out of his mind! What can I say about Mary and my marriage?"

Had I asked the last question in a rhetorical manner, a different person would be before you tonight. Since I took the question seriously, I've thought about what I could offer to you, and this is the fruit of my reflections.

In January of 1968, there was a convention of the Mariological Society at Bergamo Center. Present at that meeting were over one hundred clerics, theologians, and laymen.

During one of the discussion periods, a speaker looked out over the audience and addressed this question to the women present: *Just what does Mary mean to you, and how does she enter into your life?*

This question was startling for two reasons: first, there were only three women present in that group of one hundred plus; and second, I had never really felt the need to reflect on where Mary was in relation to me. It had always been enough for me that MARY WAS!

I took that question seriously, also. I have been four years and ten months re-

sponding. It doesn't occur to me that I shall ever be able to say I have exhausted all response. I wonder—isn't that what "mystery" should mean—knowing that you know very much about someone, yet knowing that you can never know *all* about that person? I don't consider mysteries as things I cannot understand—rather, I see mysteries as people or events I must work to understand as I return again and again to them, bringing with me the experiences that have taken place since my last encounter with mystery.

If you recall, I spoke before of valid truth being capable of analogy. I would place before you now this question: Could not my experience just told be understood in the light of the Annunciation? Was not Mary asked to respond to a Person—to take seriously what was asked? Wasn't it necessary for Mary to reflect back on what she knew from the past and share this knowledge with others? (Luke 1:26-28)

I am sure there are some of you who might consider my analogy as a most proud presumption. Yet, if we truly believe that Christ is God and we are of Christ, then why should we *not* take analogies to Christ and Mary as serious necessities? Why should we *not* risk that such a glorious gift has been given to us! To take seriously my being of Christ, I *have* to risk the possibility that you consider me proud. I say to you, truthfully, I am not proud; instead, I am truly humbled—to believe that a person is loved by God *so much* that God Himself would allow us to continue His creation as He allowed Mary—that belief can only cause a person to bow humbled in gratitude before Him. It is impossible to be proud when belief is acted upon and the believer is rewarded for his risk in acting.

Does the Annunciation Event have a meaning in Christian marriage? I would say, yes. I understand it as a man and woman asking of the other the question: "Will you take all of me that I hold most precious and beautiful, protect it, cherish it, help it to become alive, so that all of creation will benefit from my being alive, because I've offered my gift of self to you?" I can see some of you smiling knowingly, probably thinking, "That's too idealistic, she's really not being realistic." I tell you it is real. It is possible. Just keep in mind that one person's idealism can be another's realism!

Also, how do I know it is realistic? because I can look on six physical realities of Earl's and my risking. I can look on each one of you as products of two other people risking their persons to each other. I look at this campus with its buildings built because so many people, over the more than hundred years past, have risked sharing their ideas and personalities. I look at the professors on this campus who risk sharing their beauty of knowledge with students. I see the professors as people who accepted the beauty of knowledge from their teachers, nurtured that beauty with theirs, and prepared a "new creation" for the students.

You know, not only have I been describing the Annunciation Event, but also the Birth of Christ (cf. Luke 2:1-20).

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The other joyful events are possible for us to gain strength from also. Within marriage how many times are we asked to make decisions which are most difficult for our children? We are not the first to do it—Mary had to tell Jesus it was not yet time to “go it alone.” When?—in the temple incident! (Luke 2:41-50) Didn’t Jesus return to His home? (cf. Luke 2:51-52)

Also, in marriage, as in any lifestyle, there are times when our lives must take second place to the need of others. It’s very difficult when we are busy with our family community to say, “Others, too, need us.” It’s easy to be so turned inward that we lose sight of the larger family beyond our household. If Mary is well known in our life, her going out of herself to help Elizabeth can be a marvelous source of strength for us (cf. Luke 1:39-45).

And what happens when those we have had such great hopes for, appear to fail us? Mary was no stranger to that. Didn’t she have to go to her son one time and tell Him his relatives sent her because they had “decided” he was behaving badly and he should come home? (cf. Mark 3:20-21) A problem of people looking down on us? Well, I once read that if we feel ashamed of how our children look and act, what about Mary—she had a barefoot, long-haired freak, running around the country, stirring up the law-and-order forces, eating with acknowledged sinners, talking to prostitutes, and worst of all, having the *gall* to say He existed before Abraham and Moses. (cf. John 8:58) Now, if Early and I think our kids are treating us badly, what about Mary?

Yes! What of Mary—how is her faith, trust, and love of God to be understood in the light of marriage?

In order to discuss the faith aspect, let me begin with some questions that are very often asked. What is a partner supposed to do when the other is very ill? How does one half of a marriage duo becomes the “whole” of the marriage, while the other is incapable of giving? Where do parents get the strength to continue loving and caring for their child when the child says, “I’m on drugs”? How are we supposed to live with a child knowing he’ll never be able to care for himself? What happens when there isn’t enough food to go around?

Most people answer these questions with, “Yes, how do we cope with problems like that?” These are realistic situations. Mary and faith are not the answers—you’ve got to *do* something—praying isn’t enough!

If Mary’s life is well known, then praying is enough; provided the proper prayer is prayed. Since when are we supposed to expect Mary, or God, or anyone, to solve all our problems? Are we not, instead, to ask Mary, and God, and all of our friends for strength and support as we solve our problems? I believe *that* is what prayer is all about—opening ourselves to the knowledge that we are *not* alone.

Even in Genesis we are told, “It is not good that man be alone (Gen. 2:18).” Now, I ask you, is *this* kind of praying realistic? *CERTAINLY!* Did Mary have difficulty in her family living situation? What about the trip into an unknown country?—the

flight into Egypt? What about the situation of Jesus remaining in Jerusalem as a child? (cf. Luke 2:41-50). What of Mary standing at the foot of the Cross as her deepest reality of love was ridiculed and murdered? (cf. John 19:25-27) Did Mary have a family problem of people not understanding? She certainly did. And as I look at these situations I see her deep-rooted faith, which was God's gift to her response of love for Him, as her strength. Her heart *had* to have broken as our hearts are broken. She *had* to have hated to face people who were "holier than thou" as we do. She *had* to have dreaded listening to all the "wise" people who knew exactly where she failed as a mother—just as we do.

And yet, through it all, she "kept her cool." She returned to her covenant of loving faith and relied on the Father for strength to see her through as she did what she had to do.

Just as Mary did, so do we return to our covenant of faith in the Father, shared with our partners, and just as Mary, we are refreshed, renewed, and strengthened to face the anguish, the soul-searching, the hard work—the waiting—that is in store for us as we ourselves solve our problems. Mary's mystery of faith and our mystery of the marriage covenant—they can be understood together. The reward is the same as Mary's: we grow in the knowledge that God is pleased with us as he was pleased with Mary. And, as what we once believed—that God takes pleasure in us—now we know because we acted on that belief. We are freed to believe on a deeper level and act on that deeper belief. We are a constant "creation"—an annunciation and birth.

Another way of discovering how Mary can be understood in marriage is to consider how her trust in God is shown. Never is it recorded that Mary "threw in the towel." When Jesus was born, she and Joseph moved to Egypt to protect His life (cf. Matthew 2:13-15). When Jesus was in Jerusalem, she and Joseph returned to bring Him home (cf. Luke 2:46-52). When Christ was at the wedding feast, she let Him know the people needed help (cf. John 2:1-11). When her own husband had doubts about her, she didn't enter into a "dialogue of defense." Instead, she responded with patience, she trusted until, in *God's time*, Joseph understood (cf. Matthew 1:19-25). At the Crucifixion did she lash out at the crowd? Did she scream at them for what they were doing? Did she blame others for her heart break? Not at all. She remembered her covenant, her pact, with the Father and *stood* facing the agony of the Cross; remained, as John says, "*standing at the foot of the Cross*" and received her Son's lifeless body in her arms as gently and as tenderly as she received Him at His birth. The lady *knew* how to trust—against all odds—she never turned from those whom she loved! (cf. John 19:25-27)

Is this knowledge of help to us? Very much so! How does a wife hold up when her husband must travel and she must be both father and mother to the family? What does a husband do when he must be away from home for long periods of time? How do husbands and wives find strength to make decisions on future children as they stand before the face of God! How do husbands and wives look on the reality that their

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work outside the home will necessitate their partner's working closely with other men or women? All these questions can be answered by the same words, "We trust each other." Yes, we trust. Why? Because of our covenant of faith in the other, made before the Father, and rewarded by a sense of refreshment, renewal, and strength that comes when problems are met and solved or resolved together. We risk taking a chance that our commitment to the other is as *sacred to her or him as it is to me*. This risk is possible because of the knowledge that people before us lived through trials and because people after us will have the same difficulties to face. With this idea in our minds, we know that all our suffering, our efforts are not in vain. We, too, have our *Flight into Egypt*: our moving out into unknown territory.

And now, before turning to our last aspect of Mary and marriage—the love issue let's digress a moment to consider some questions that cause difficulties for many people. I bring these questions before you, because just recently our bishops spoke to the situation of Mary in the lives of Catholics today. They asked us to enter into dialogue with our Christian brothers and, in trust, look at problems that cause concern to both sides. (See "Behold Your Mother" National Conference of Catholic Bishops November 21, 1973).

The most prominent of difficulties, as I perceive it, happens to be the consideration of Mary and whether she was living a married relationship with Joseph as we understand it today. At present, while I truly assent to the doctrine of Mary's virginity, I find myself rather uncomfortable assenting to the doctrine without asking myself the question "Should I reflect on the possibility of virginity being a reality of life that is not opposed to a conjugal relationship?" (cf. Matthew 1:19-25)

As a married woman, I know from personal experience the beauty of the gift of self to another in sacred physical love. Is this not a "virginal gift," also? What are the different depths of the meaning of virginal? Does not mystery mean a constant unfolding of depths? (cf. I Corinthians 13:12). Yes, these are hard, difficult, questions to ask and to seek to answer. Yet, should we not ask them? At present, I can only ask these questions and ask for help from others to share their reflections. I love God and Mary enough to live with these difficulties for the present time.

And now for the final issue of Mary in Christian marriage: her living out her love of the Father.

If I called Mary by the one title I hold above all others, I would call Mary the "Loving Covenant of Yes" (cf. II Corinthians 2:18-20). As I perceive Mary, she was a person who loved so well that she committed herself to God once for all time. In every trial in her life, she returned to that moment of her loving commitment of "yes," gathered strength from those roots, and returned refreshed and renewed to cope with the problems of life that she could now call "possibilities for saying yes." (cf. Luke 7:38)

Is it possible today for a Christian marriage to have a yes commitment? I say, YES!

When struggles arise in a marriage, how do we handle them? As Mary did, we don't run away; we *stand* at the cross of struggle, face the heartbreak, take it into ourselves. We accept the suffering as the evil it is, overcome it by believing and trusting that we are loved by God, and act on that loving faith and trust by expecting God to strengthen us to do what we must do. In that manner, God overcomes the evil by allowing us to do His work (cf. Romans 8:31-39).

As Mary cooperated with God, so are we permitted to cooperate; not because we are deserving, but because we are "beloved by the Father." When one is loved, there is never no: there is only yes—yes, God reaches to us, and yes, we reach to God (cf. II Corinthians 2:18-22).

I see this carried out so often by married people. There occur heartaches to the family through failures, or sickness, or death. The strength of all the family to come through these difficulties comes from the family going back to its roots—the loving "yes" commitment of the husband and wife, made before God and the family of man—*affirmed* first when they spoke to each other of their love, and *confirmed* time after time, whenever they made the world better by their concern for the total community. This action can be carried out equally as well by creating physical children or spiritual children.

As it was impossible for Mary to be a "loving yes" to God and the world not be better, so, too, is it impossible for married people to be a "loving yes" to each other and the world not be better.

This all sounds "too good to be true," doesn't it? Well, even Mary wondered "How can this be?" And Mary was told, "The power of the Holy Spirit will overshadow you and you shall conceive." (cf. Luke 1:26-38).

This same situation can be understood today. To make it very realistic for those of you who *still* consider me a person with her feet not firmly on the ground, let me end with a selection from author James Joyce. While it definitely refers to a response between a man and a woman, I consider it also a wonderful analogy to a response between God and man. I consider this excerpt the highest form of human beauty. And is it not said that grace builds on nature? Here is the citation:

... And then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes ... and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will ...

YES. (*Ulysses*, JAMES JOYCE)

Consecrated Celibacy and the Mystery of Mary

Elizabeth Lang, O.S.U.

I am deeply honored to be here this evening. I come to you, not as an expert in Marian doctrine, but as a committed religious and as a woman who has related to Mary in different ways and on different levels during the past thirty years. I go back to age 10 because I suspect it was about this time that a real love and devotion to Mary was beginning to flourish in my life. Perhaps a brief sharing of the highlights of my personal relationship with Mary will be beneficial at this point. I can recall very vividly my times of fear and loneliness as I was "growing up"—those moments we all have as boys and girls when we become troubled or unsure, and I remember asking Mary to cover me with her mantle of peace and love and the positive reassurance this always gave me. So often I ask for this simple faith again, but that childlike belief is past. As a high school student and young religious I tried to follow St. Louis de Montfort's perfect devotion to Mary, and only God and Mary know how I succeeded. It was so easy during my first years of teaching in elementary school to talk about Mary. I shall never forget the year that my sixth and seventh grade boys begged me to let them be in charge of the May altar—the girls had always been the favored ones before. What a beautiful job they did!

As the years passed I struggled with the same problems that the Church and all of you contended with. Devotion to the Mother of God was not lost but was not uppermost either. We were so fearful "to take away from Christ." In my teaching of high school religion, Mary was still the ideal Christian woman, but the stress was different. No longer could the same methods be used. Devotion to Mary was not popular for the most part with high school girls, and it took much effort to convince them of Mary's importance and role in our lives. When Sister Elizabeth Cashman asked me to present this paper, I felt it was a real invitation by Christ and His Mother to set my sights clearly again.

The mystery and wonder of Mary as she lived her life was so great that we can find her as an ideal Christian married woman and an ideal woman religious. I am not implying by that statement that married women are not religious—I am just making the distinction between the married state and the religious state. In my judgment both are beautiful callings to a deeply spiritual life.

Consecrated celibacy and all that it entails may well be the only—certainly the biggest—difference between them. Mrs. Moorman has addressed herself to the married women so let us turn to Mary as the model of the 20th-century woman religious.

Mary was one of the *anawim*, one of the humble souls who staked all on Yahweh's promise. Their spirit was that of lowliness, openness, poverty, emptiness, but they possessed a readiness to do and be about God's will. Their secret was how to be little (but I add effective) in God's hands. The *anawim* had a sense of human powerlessness mingled with a strong trust in God. They were patient in waiting and had the clinging love of a child. In being open to God, they were also open to others. So much of their spirit I feel is reflected in the Beatitudes (Math. 5:3-6):

How blest are the poor in spirit; the reign of God is theirs. (The NEB translates: "How blest are those who know their need of God; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.")

Blest too are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled.

Blest are the lowly; they shall inherit the land.

Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness; they shall have their fill.

Blest are the single-hearted for they shall see God.

From just the few accounts we have of Mary in Sacred Scripture we can note how well she fulfills the qualifications of the *anawim*. Because of the knowledge and rich insights of tradition which have come down to us through the years, we tend to believe that Mary "really had it made." She was conceived without original sin, was told by an angel that she was going to be the Mother of God, etc. But we forget that Mary's call was similar to the loving invitation that God gives to all of us—a call to Faith, a total commitment to God's word—an openness and readiness to receive (the spirit of the *anawim*). She did question the angel ("How can this be since I do not know man?"). Therefore was she as certain of her role as we might think? She was fearful and concerned when her Son was lost! "Son, why have you done this to us? You see that your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow." Why was she so concerned, if she believed her Son to be the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity?

Many scholars today believe that it was not until Pentecost that Mary became fully aware of who Christ was and what His mission entailed. And yet she responded in faith to God's plan by her "fiat" and opened humanity to the "One who would reverse man's self-sufficiency by a life of obedience unto death, by a life lived among men as one who serves." This faith and openness to God's plan is the spirit of the *anawim* in its perfection. St. Augustine says, "Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ." Perhaps here is found the mystery of all virginity—pure and entire faith which is itself a gift of God and which relies on God for its fruitfulness—a fruitfulness often hidden and unsuspected. "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed." St. Luke also supports this premise. Although he does not exclude any praise of Mary's celibacy, he prefers to focus attention on her faith, her total dedication of herself to God's salvific work. Faith could be called the "will to be saved."

Mary's Immaculate Conception is more than a mere fact—it is a saving truth. In and through it has been revealed the perfect solidarity or unity and intimacy of Our Lady with Jesus. This unity served as a preparation for her Divine Maternity and

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the work of Salvation. Mary is a SIGN of all men's hopes and goals. And yet, Mary is the perfect example of the *anawim*.

In the interpretation of the Remnant tradition, closely associated with the *anawim* since they made up this Remnant, an important fact is to be noted. The Lord intended to single out from His Chosen People one small group to be the bearers of the Messianic Hope. This purification process ended in Mary. And so another aspect of the *anawim* is seen—they were the ones whom God favored—members of His *faithful* Remnant. They learned from their poor condition—learned dependence on the Lord and openness to His grace. They had trust in His love and providence. Because of their emptiness, not only of money and goods, but of true power and esteem, they heard more easily the voice of the Lord. As beloved of Him, they were constantly being called by their Lord. Each one's material poverty, however, was different because a certain level will teach dependence and openness to one, but a further level will destroy or preoccupy to the point of hindering a view of the Lord. Therefore, poverty, the spirit of the *anawim*, focuses on our call from the Lord and celibacy stresses man's response. Celibacy has an aspect of solitude and loneliness, but also includes an openness and spirit of expectation. It touches man in the very core of his love life, his response to others—has him bodily and spiritually consecrate himself totally to the Lord. It is incompleteness awaiting fruition . . . “and Mary pondered . . .”

Therefore, as we look back over the time before Christ, we see the importance and intimate connection between poverty and celibacy: the condition to be open to God's call—Poverty—and the ability to respond—Celibacy. At the threshold of the new era, the birth of Christ and the union of humanity with God was first accomplished in a decisive way in Mary and then in the Church. The mystery of Mary must always be within the greater mystery of the Church. She is the prototype of virginity in its ecclesial dimension. Her *Magnificat* proves her knowledge of Sacred Scripture and her reliance on God's work for nourishment and illumination. She pondered—she integrated those words with the experience of God in her own life. She went with haste to Elizabeth—she desired to share her good news with another in a deeply personal way. Within her own soul she encompassed the infinite longing of the poor of this world, that longing which forms the spiritual treasure of the people of God. In looking upon the poverty of his handmaid, God has lowered His gaze to rest upon the poverty of the people of the Exodus on their march toward the Promised Land. In Mary all the poverty and all the love of the past generations reach out to meet God and to receive Him in the Person of Jesus. In her the poor of Yahweh reach the end of their spiritual journey and enter directly into the kingdom of Christ. All generations proclaim her blessed because she stands at the center of the Salvation History of the Chosen People, at the very point where the Old Covenant becomes the New Covenant—where the suffering of the Old Testament meets and enters into communion with the poverty of Christ, who became poor for our sake that by His poverty we might become rich.

But Christ allows the mystery of Mary to continue down through the ages. Religious women today take her as their model. She is the mature Christian woman. I would like to emphasize and elaborate on that last word—WOMAN. Mary was a woman, not a naive young girl. As I said before she questioned the angel. Not because she doubted her God, but she wanted to know “How”? She was open to and responded to God all her life; so that at this invitation of God, she discerned His will and then responded with her “Fiat.” She lived through the pregnancy, the birth of Jesus, the early childhood, the loss in the temple, the loss of Joseph, the public life—pondering and responding “Fiat.” She stood at the foot of the Cross and wondered “Why”? but her response was always “Fiat.” Thirty-three years of not knowing exactly where it was all heading—yet during all this time, her Fiat. If Consecrated Celibacy is the ability to respond to God’s love, Mary has certainly shown us the way.

Now we must go one step further and ask ourselves: how can we become that mature woman—like Mary—who will be able to respond to the promptings of grace in our lives. We must take advantage of our 20th-century knowledge. Gordon Allport has listed six qualifications of a mature personality, which I believe are worthy of note here:

1. We must extend ourselves, become interested and involved in many different areas, broaden our environment.
2. We must be able to relate *warmly* and meaningfully to others; have a real impact on the relationship. People we meet are never exactly the same once they know us.
3. We must possess a fundamental emotional security and acceptance of ourselves. We are women and there is no reason to be sorry about it. (Sometimes I feel that women’s lib advocates are going about things in the wrong way. In their desire for equality they sometimes step off the pedestal which, I believe, they are on.) We are different, even if culture has made us so; we have a valuable contribution to make; we do need to be recognized as persons and given equal rights, but I believe femininity has qualities other than physical ones that masculinity does not have, and accepting them is a mark of maturity.
4. We must perceive, think and act *with zest* in accordance with outer reality. To me each phrase of that statement is important, especially for women religious. The enthusiasm we exhibit in sticking with the reality of the situation and not turning into our own fantasy can be of such help to the modern world.
5. We must be capable of self-objectification, of insight and *humor*. Again, how much Christian joy is needed in the world today!
6. We must live in harmony with a unifying philosophy of life; I do hope we all have this.

The celibate life is often looked upon as a very lonely life. I believe it is solitude, not loneliness, that should be its characteristic. Anne Morrow Lindberg, in her book *Gift from the Sea*, talks about solitude. Her whole book is a guide for women to learn this art. She believes it is absolutely necessary for any woman to be alone

some time each day, each week, each year. The openness that is descriptive of the *anawim* is thereby engendered. Patience and faith is what the sea teaches. "One should lie empty, open, choiceless as a beach—waiting for a gift from the sea." (A modern description of the *Anawim*?) Mrs. Lindberg opens her book with this statement, and then proceeds: from her solitude she felt a oneness and joy with God's creation of earth and sea and air. She could better appreciate the beauties of nature and enjoy an even greater closeness to her fellow man. In her solitude she strips herself of material possessions—one does not need much, alone in a cottage on a beach. Here she finds herself—important because "when one is a stranger to oneself then one is estranged from others too."

Woman is the eternal nourisher of children, of men, of society: this demands that she give—not purposelessly, however. Purposeful giving is not apt to deplete one's resources. The more one gives, the more one has to give. But even purposeful giving must have a source to refill it. Solitude—pondering. Women must find that inner stillness which Charles Morgan describes as "the stilling of the soul within the activities of the mind and body so that it might be still as the axis of a revolving wheel is still." What an appropriate image of Mary and an ideal for the religious of today: to be the still axis within the revolving wheel of relationships, obligations, and activities. To be able to do this amid the myriad duties of today which tend toward fragmentation, religious women need to conquer the art of solitude which should be an outgrowth of their consecrated celibacy.

Negatively, celibacy has reference to abstention and detachment from a most beautiful area of human love. A keen and profound appreciation of this God-given human reality allows a person who knowingly and freely accepts celibacy to offer to God and the Church a great sacrifice and gift, one which is tremendously pleasing to God since it symbolizes life and love in itself. In celibate consecration, a relationship is established with Christ and His people that is unique and exclusive, a relationship flowing from a special calling from God. In service and complete dedication one can be for others as Christ was and is. The life of Mary as we have thought of it this evening is a prime example of this celibate love. Such love and its expression is a truly significant dimension in the life of the Church and thus must be fostered and protected with great care and reverence.

How do we as contemporary religious women and followers of Mary experience celibate love today? By total commitment to the person of Christ and the needs of his people. Such an experience will demand a knowledge and sensitivity to the values involved in such a dedication. It will demand a generosity and spirit of sacrifice of no small account. It will demand God's help and the support of community. It will demand our saying, with Mary, "Fiat."

Vatican II in its Decree on Religious life has placed celibacy as the constitutive element in Religious life. Virginity is a gift in the theological order. It implies action on the part of God as well as on the part of man. It is the acceptance, definitive and

enduring on God's part of the gift of self which He has inspired in man. St. Paul tells us that a Christian virgin constitutes an essential sign of that life to come. She is concerned with the things of the Lord (cf. I Cor. 7, 34). She is a prophetic reality. She is also a sign of the present good. St. Matthew reveals virginity as a state of witness to the reality of Redemption (cf. Math. 19, 21); St. Luke, as the ideal condition of the pilgrim disciple of Christ (cf. Lk. 20, 34s), a consecrated state daily renewed.

In summary, perhaps we can say, Virginity or Consecrated Celibacy is a charismatic gift establishing one through faith, hope and love in the state of witness to the redemption. And is this not the mystery of Mary?

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